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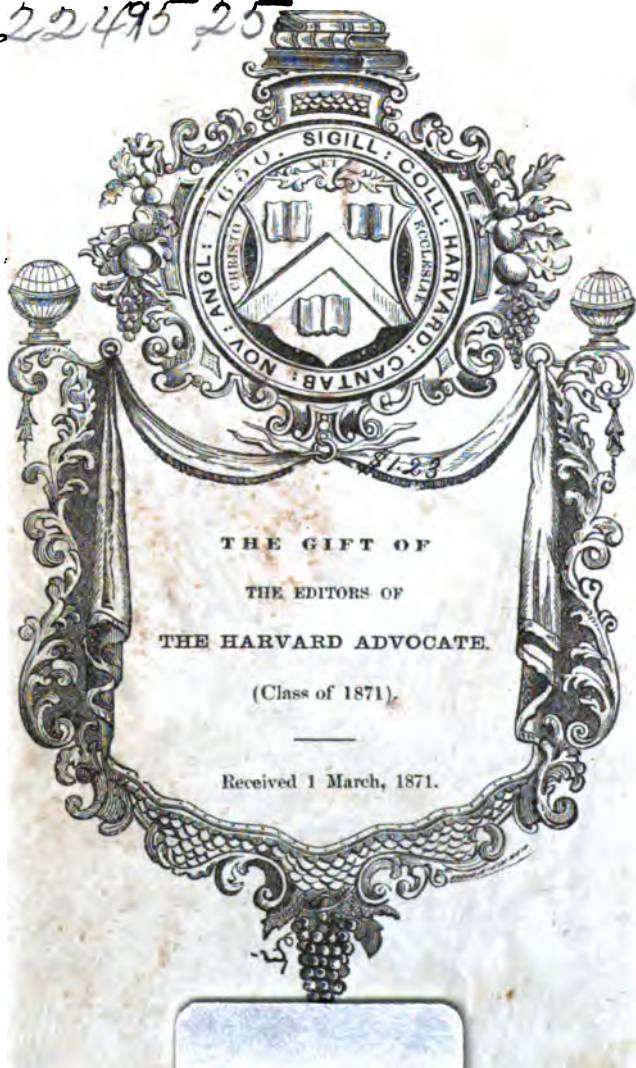
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EPISODES IN AN OBSCURE LIFE

EPISODES IN AN OBSCURE LIFE

By
Richard Row.



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I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE publication of these Experiences was not sought by me. It was the suggestion of the friend who found out that I had kept a diary, got hold of it, and persuaded me to let him make extracts from it, and then further persuaded me to expand those extracts into something like literary shape; not (as he was candid enough to tell me) because he thought that there was anything remarkable in the diarist, but because the people amongst whom I have spent the greater part of my life—normal as they have long seemed to me—seemed out-of-the-common to him. Of course, however, I trust that in letting these records be taken from their obscurity I have not been influenced by vanity, or other unworthy motive. *Vanity*, though, do I say? In spite of the self-flattery with which the most secret diaries are written, trying to persuade the writer through his eyes (when there is no one else to be deceived) that he is a better

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man than his heart tells him that he is, even my own confessions will show that I have small reason to be vain.

Young people, I suppose, would reckon me old. At any rate, I remember blooming young brides who are now grandmothers, and children that I have nursed have now children of their own; but (if any man *can* read his own heart) I may honestly say that no proffer of preferment would tempt me to leave the squalid district in which my hairs have grown grey. I should like to lay them within the shadow of the mother-church in which I began my East-End labours. Wise sanitary arrangements have rendered this impossible, but I hope to be buried in the Tower Hamlets' Cemetery. In a fluctuating population like that in which I have laboured, personal ties are very often suddenly snapped; but I have a personal attachment to the *type* of people who have been so long my neighbours, and it would gratify me to know that my old body would sleep within the circle of the smoke and noise in which they spend their troublous lives.

It would be affectation—falsehood—to insinuate that I was always thus contented. Clergymen, like other men, have their ambitions, and, perhaps, have as much justification for them, and quite as honest a justification, as laymen have, in the hope of 'securing a sphere of greater usefulness.' But then clergymen are no better judges than other men of what is really for their good. I feel now (if I may say so without irreverence to God's government) that it would have been a great mistake if, in the days when I was by no means inclined to utter a coy *nolo præferri*, I had obtained a benefice. I was

meant to be a curate amongst struggling people, if, without conceit, I may suppose that I was specially meant to be anything; and I am thankful that I found this out early enough in my career to be able to throw full bodily strength, as well as, I trust, my whole heart's devotion, into curate's labours, without looking upon them as a parenthetical, painful preparation for rest (in this world) —*otium cum dignitate*. Many a heart-ache have those labours caused me, and yet I have found in them an exceeding great reward.

They have been obscure enough, but I would humbly offer a prayer that God may in his goodness bless this humble record of them to the furtherance of the Gospel—peace on earth, good-will amongst men—harbinger and antepast of heavenly joys.

II.

'LITTLE CREASES.'

WHEN I first came up to town, it was to become junior curate of one of the East End's mother-churches. I lodged in a baker's first-floor rooms. The residence could boast of some 'amenities.' When I looked out of my window in rainy weather, I could see—thanks to the under-ground bake-house—the pavement beneath a dry patch in the midst of sloppiness on all sides; and the snow melted there almost as soon as it fell. But, *per contra*, the sickly-sour scent of the new bread was at times almost stifling, and the floury 'black-beetles' marched up in such squadrons from the bake-house, that I was forced to keep a hedge-hog; and the antidote turned out to be almost as great a nuisance as the bane. I am ashamed to say that at first my temper was ruffled by these trivial annoyances. Just because there was nothing to boast of in bearing them, they annoyed all the more. It was

'Little Creases' who shamed me out of my puerile pettishness.

One sultry summer night, when I was still quite a novice in London, the beetles had kept me awake by crawling over me, and dropping from the bed-curtains like windfall fruit. In the early morning the scent of the hot bread came steaming up the stairs, and to get the nearest approach to fresh air within my power, I half-dressed and threw up one of my sitting-room windows. As I was leaning out of it, the police-sergeant, who lodged in the room above, clumped up the staircase. 'Morning, sir,' he said, stopping at the open door. 'Up early. Can't sleep, eh? Well, it *is* rather close; but just you look at that little gal cuttin' along there. This is a palace to where she has been a-sleepin', an' yet she's off to the market pipin' like a little lark. She's thankful for the 'eat, she is. It's bitter work for her when she's to turn out in the winter mornin's. I do pity that poor little soul. I've little gals of my own. Little Creases she's known as, and she's been at the cress-sellin', off an' on, this two years, though she ain't eight yet. *Creases!* She don't look much like a *Cræsis*, do she, sir?' and, with a grin at his pun, the pitying policeman mounted towards his bed.

The little girl to whom he had called my attention wore a fragment of a black straw bonnet, with gaping chinks in its plait, through which her matted curls bulged like bows of dirty silk. A limp, ragged, mud-hued calico frock reached to where the calves ought to have been in her bare, skinny little legs. That was all her dress. In

one hand she carried a rusty iron tray, thumping upon it, tambourine-fashion, with the other, as an accompaniment to 'The days when we went gipsying,' which she sang, as she trotted along, in a clear, sweet little voice that justified the police-sergeant in likening her to a lark. At the end of the street she put the empty tray upon her head, and merrily shrilling out, 'Pies ! pies ! all 'ot ! all 'ot !' turned the corner and disappeared.

The next time I saw the sergeant I asked him where Little Creases lived. 'Bottom house in Bateman's Rents ; that's Miss Creases's address when she's at home,' was his answer. 'I can't rightly remember just now which room it is, but you ask any one about there where Little Creases dosses, and they'll show you, sir. She lives with her granny. They're a rough lot down there, but they've some sort of a respect both for the old gal an' the little un, an' they won't insult you, sir, if they think you wants to do 'em a kindness. I'll go with you an' welcome, if you like, when I'm off ; but they'll think more on ye, sir, if you don't go with one of us. No, sir, the Force *ain't* popular, and yet it's only our duty that we try to do ; and monkey's allowance we get for doin' on it. If you want to ketch the little un in and awake, you'd better go somewheres between six and seven in the evenin'. The little un has to tramp a weary way to sell her stuff, an' she's glad enough, I'll go bail, to go to her 'by-by,' as my littlest calls it, when she's had her grub. You know your way to the Rents, sir ? Second turnin' to the left, arter you pass the Duke o' York. You can't mistake it, sir—the name's up jist inside the archway.'

On the following evening I found my way to Bateman's Rents. The archway was almost choked with gasping loungers, who looked at first very sullenly at me; but when I inquired after Little Creases, and used the very term which the sergeant had taught me—much as a Moravian missionary might use his first conciliatory bit of Esquimese—the loungers relaxed into a general grin. 'She've jest come in, sir,' said a hulking rough, leaning against a post. 'Jim, go and show the parson where Little Creases *dosses*;' and at this repetition of the friends-making pass-word there was another general grin.

Jim, a shock-headed youth, whose dress consisted of a one-sleeved shirt and a pair of trousers with a leg and a half, upheld by a single brace of greasy twine, speedily piloted me to the bottom of the Rents, and up a filthy, creaking staircase to the first-floor back of the last house. 'Creases!' he shouted, as we stopped at the open door of a dark little dungeon of a room, 'ere's a parson a-lookin' arter ye. Whatever 'as you been a-doin' on?'

The only window of the room gave on a high dead wall within arm's-length of it; and though half of the window-panes were broken, the room on that hot evening was very close as well as dark. It was very dirty also, and so was the parchment-skinned old woman who sat crouching, from the force of habit, over the little rusty, empty grate. Opposite her sat Little Creases, on the floor. The old woman's half-backed arm-chair, and the low bedstead on which she and her granddaughter slept together, were almost all the furniture. The scantiness of the bed-clothes did not matter so much in that sultry

weather ; but, hot as it was, it almost made one shiver to think of lying under them in winter.

‘Yes, sir,’ said the old woman when I had seated myself on the bed, and stated why I had come, ‘Bessie an’ me ‘as ‘ad our tea. No, we don’t light a fire this time o’ year. It’s heasy to git a potful o’ bilin’ water somewheres or other—our pot don’t take much to fill it. It ain’t much the neighbours can do for us, but what they can they will, I must say that. No, I don’t think I could git any on ‘em to clean up my room. They hain’t got the time, an’ if they ‘ad they hain’t got the water.’

I was young then, and had a weakness for giving a ‘professional’ turn to conversation ; pluming myself on my clerical cleverness when I had lugged in a text of Scripture, *apropos* of anything—more often, in fact, of nothing. I began to talk about the woman of Samaria and the water of life, in a way that I could not help feeling was hazy even to myself. The old woman listened to me for a time in sulkily patient silence, although plainly without the slightest comprehension of what I meant. I was having my say, she thought, and she would get hers by and by, and would get all the more out of it, if she ‘behaved proper’ whilst I was talking. She was full of complaints, when her turn came ; especially at the hardship of her having to support a great girl like Bessie, although, so far as I could make out, Bessie contributed at least her full share of the cost of the old woman’s room-keeping. Finding that I had small chance of hearing anything about Little Creases, except the amount of bread she ate, in her self-contained grandmother’s pre-

sence, I proposed that Bessie should visit me at my lodgings next morning; and to this arrangement the grandmother grudgingly consented, when I had promised to make good the loss which the little girl would incur through giving up her work.

I was amused to see how I sank in the 'social' estimation of my new acquaintances when they learnt that I was lodging at a baker's. 'Wilson' was a very rich man in their opinion, and 'made good bread, an' guv fairish weight—better than the English bakers, though he *was* a Scotchman;' but Bessie and Granny had at times bought bread of Mr Wilson, and therefore looked upon themselves as his patronesses, and at me as a 'kind o' make-believe sort o' gen'leman' to be lodging on his first-floor. They evidently felt comforted when they heard that Little Creases was to knock at the private door.

I was looking out for her when she knocked. Had I not been, the 'slavey' most likely would have ordered her off as 'a himpident match-gal as wouldn't take No.'

Bessie was rather shy at first, but when she was asked what she would like to have, she suggested, 'Wilson sells stunnin' brandy-snaps,' with a glibness which showed that she had the answer ready on her tongue. Whilst she was munching her anticipated dainties, I got a little of her history out of her, which I will put together here, as nearly as I can in her own words:—

'My name's Bessie—ye called me so yerself. Some calls me Little Creases, an' some jist Creases—'cos I sells 'em. Yes, Bessie, I s'pose, is my Chris'n name. I don't know as I've got another name. Granny 'as. Marther's

'er Chris'n name, an' sometimes folks calls 'er Missis Jude—sometimes they calls 'er Hold Winegar, but that ain't horfen. No, sir, they don't call 'er that to 'er face. Granny 'ud give it back to 'em if they did, an' they ain't a bad lot—not them as we lives with. No, I can't remember when I fust come to live with Granny—'ow could I? I was jist a babby, Granny says. Oh, Granny does whatever she can—*she* ain't a .lie-a-bed. Sometimes she goes hout cheerin' now, but she ain't strong enough for that, an' the work an' what she gits to drink makes 'er precious cross when she comes 'ome. Yes, I love Granny, though she do take hall I arns. She've a right to, I s'pose. She says so, anyways, 'cos she took me when father and mother died, an' father 'ad wexed 'er. No, I can't remember nuffink o' them—an' I don't see as it matters much: There's kids in the Rents as 'as got fathers an' mothers as is wuss hoff than me. Well, I s'pose, when I grows up, I can spend what I gits accordin' to my own mind. But I 'on't forgit Granny. She may growl, but she never whopped me—an' some on 'em *does* get whopped. Yes, sir, I knows I ought to be thankful to Granny for takin' care on me afore I could git my hown livin'—didn't I say so? No, I can't read, an' I can't write. I never went to school. What's the good o' that to folks like me as 'as to arn their livin'? I know 'ow much I oughter give a 'and for my creases, an' then 'ow to split 'em up inter bunches, an' I'm pickin' up the prices o' hother thinx at the markets, an' that's hall a gal like me need know. Readin' an' writin' may be hall very well for little gals as can't 'elp theirselves, but I

don't see as it would be hany 'elp to me. Yes, I likes to look at picturs sometimes in the shops, but I can make out what they means—them as I cares about—wi'out readin'. Where does I git my creases? Why, at the markit. Where else should I git 'em? Yes, it *is* cold gittin' up in the dark, an' the creases feels shivery when you git a harmful, when the gas is a-burnin'. But what's the good o' growlin' when you've got to do it? An' the women as sells 'em is horfen kinder in the winter, though they looks half-perished theirselves, tuckin' their 'ands under their harms, wi' the frost on 'em. One on 'em last winter guv me a fair markit'-and when I 'adn't got no stock-money, an' the browns to git a cup o' cawfee an' a bread-and-butter. Golly, that did do me good, for it was hawful cold, an' no mistake. If it 'adn't been for the pain in 'em, my toes an' fingers seemed jist as if they didn't belong to me. But it's good fun this time o' year. We 'ave our larks when we're a-pumpin' on the creases, an' a-settin' on the steps tyin' 'em up. Rushes we ties 'em with. No, we 'avn't to pay for the rushes—they're gived us by them as sells the creases. Yes, I think I've seed rushes a-growin'—in 'Ackney Marshes—but there wasn't much in that, as I could see. I'd rather be where there was houses, if *that's* country. It's sloppier than the streets is. No, I don't go to church. Granny says that she used to go, but they never give her nuffink, so she dropped it. 'Sides, Sunday's when I sells most. Folks likes a relish a-Sundays for their breakfastes an' teases; an' when I ain't a-walkin' about, I likes to git a snooze. 'Sides, I hain't no clothes fit to go to church in. No, an'

I don't go to theaytres an' that, nayther—I sh'd like to if I'd got the browns. I've 'eared say that it's as fine as the Queen a-hopenin' Parli'ment—the Forty Thieves at the Pawilion is. Yes, I've seed the Queen once. I was in the Park when she come along wi' them fine gen'lemen on 'ossback a-bangin' away at the drums an' that; I s'pose them was the Parli'ment. I never was so far afore, an' I ain't been since, an' I was wery tired, but I squeegeed in among the folks. Some on 'em was swells, an' some on 'em was sich as me, an' some on 'em was sich as shop-keepers. One hold feller says to me, says he, "What do you want 'ere, my little gal?" "I want to see the Queen, an' Prince Halbert, an' the Parli'ment gen'lemen," says I. "I'm a Parli'ment gen'leman," says he, "but I ain't a goin' down to-day." I worn't a-goin' to let 'im think he could do me like that, for he worn't dressed nigh so smart as Wilson a-Sundays. "You're chaffin'," says I; "why hain't you got a 'oss, an' a goold coat, an' summat to blow?" Then he busted out larfin' fit to kill 'isself; and says he, "Oh, you should 'ear me in Parli'ment a-blowin' my own trumpet, an' see me a-ridin' the 'igh 'oss there." I think he was 'alf-silly, but he was wery good-natur'd—silly folks horfen is. He lifted me hup right over the people's 'eads, and I see the Queen wi' my own heyes, as plain as I see you, sir, an' Prince Halbert, too, a-bowin' away like them himages in the grocers' winders. I thought it was huncommon queer to see the Queen a-bowin'. I'd 'spected that all on us would a-'ad to bob down as hif we was playin' 'oney-pots when she come by. But, law, there she was a-bowin' away to

heverybody, an' so was Prince Halbert. I knew 'im from the picturs, though he didn't seem 'arf so smart as the gen'leman that druv the 'osses. What a nice-lookin' gen'leman, though, that Prince Halbert is! I do believe that himage in the barber's winder in Bishopsgate, with the goold sheet on, ain't 'arf as 'ansome. Wisher may die hif he didn't bow to me! The queer hold cove I was a-settin' on, guv me 'is 'at to shake about like the other folks—law, 'ow they did shake their 'ats an' their 'anker chers, an' beller as if they'd bust theirselves! An' Prince Halbert grinned at me kind-like; an' then he guv the Queen a nudge, an' *she* grinned, an' guv me a bow too, an' the folks all turned round to look at me, an' I felt as hif I was a swell. The hold cove was huncommon pleased, an' he guv me a 'arf-a-bull, so Granny said he was a real Parli'ment gen'leman arter all.'

'And what did you do with the money, Bessie?' I asked.

'Guv it to Granny.'

'But didn't you get any of it?'

'Oh, yes. Granny'd a blow out o' trotters, an' she guv me one, an' huncommon good it were.'

A little girl who had sold water-cresses for two years, with no more memorable treat than a trotter, could not be injured, I thought, by a little indulgence. If I confirmed Bessie in her opinion that, in the complimentary words she had already used in reference to me, I wasn't 'sich a bad sort, arter all,' I might be able to 'get hold' of her, and eventually do her more good than giving her a little passing pleasure. Still I was at a loss how to

carry out my plan of giving her a day's treat ; so I asked her to choose her entertainment for herself.

'Well,' she answered promptly, 'I should like to 'ave some more to heat bimeby ;' and then, after a minute's pause, 'an' I should like to go up the Monument. I've horfen seed the folks at the top like rats in a cage ; an' I should like to 'ave a look down through them railin's, too.'

Little Creases' costume, although it attracted little attention to herself, was likely to make a clerical companion stared at, even in London's crowded streets, where men brush past each other never heeding,—frowning, and laughing, and even talking, as if they were in a dark, double-locked room alone, instead of publishing their secrets of character, at any rate, in broad noon, to the one in ten thousand who may have leisure or inclination to notice them. I thought, however, that it would be a bad beginning with Bessie, if I wished to secure her confidence, to seem to be ashamed of her clothes. So I got my hat, and proposed that we should start at once. When I took hold of her hand outside the front door, I could see that she thought that in my case, as in that of her parliamentary friend in the Mall, wit was not equal to good-will. We were chaffed a little as we walked along. A policeman asked me if I wanted to give the little girl in charge, and when I answered that the little girl was taking a walk with me, looked more than half inclined to take me into custody myself. 'Oh, he's a-doin' the good Samaritan dodge in public, Bobby,' explained a sneering on-looker ; 'lettin' 'is light shine afore men. He don't mean no more mischief than that. I know the ways o'

them parsons. They'd be precious deep, if they knew how.' I must confess that this gloss upon my behaviour did annoy me, because I felt that I had laid myself open to it. But is it not a satire on our Christianity that we should think it 'very odd' to see a person in whole clothes talking to one in rags, unless the continuously clad person be either bullying or benefiting the intermittently clad from the top of a high cliff of universally admitted social superiority?

I do not know who takes the money at the Monument now. At the time of which I write the money-taker was a very morose old fellow, who seemed to regret that the gallery had been caged in. 'You can't fling her over,' he growled, as we began to mount the weary, winding stairs.

'Did you hear what he said, Bessie?' I asked, with a laugh.

'Oh yes, I 'eared 'im,' little Creases answered gravely; 'but I ain't afeared. I'd scratch so as ye couldn't, if ye wanted to, an' it ain't sich as you does thinx to git put in the papers. It's chaps as can fight does them kind o' thinx.'

For a wonder, the day being so fine, we had the gallery at first to ourselves. 'That's a buster,' said Bessie, as she mounted the last step, 'I'll 'ave a blow now. Law, 'ow my legs do ache, an' I feel dizzy like. I shouldn't ha' been 'arf so tired if I'd been a-goin' my rounds.'

'And yet you wanted to come up, Bessie?'

'Well, I know I did—helse I shouldn't ha' come.'

'There are other people besides you, Bessie, that want

to get up in the world, and then, when they do get up, are half sorry that they took the trouble. So you may be content to carry about your tray.'

But analogical moralizing of this kind (as I might have expected, had not those been the salad days of my surpliced life) shot quite over Bessie's head.

'Who said I worn't content?' she asked, in angry bewilderment. 'What's the Moniment got to do wi' creases? I shall work them till I can get sumfink better.'

Bessie was more interested when I explained to her the meaning of the 'goold colly-flower,' as she called the gilt finial; but she was very much disappointed when she was told that the Great Fire after all had not been caused by Roman Catholics. 'They'd 'a done it, if they could, though,' she commentated. 'I can't abide them wild Hirish—they's so savage, an' they's so silly. There's Blue Anchor Court close by the Rents as is full o' Romans, an' they's al'ays a-pitchin' inter each hother wi'out knowin' what's it all about. Law, 'ow they do send the tongses an' pokers flyin' of a Saturday night! An' the women is wuss than the men, wi' their back hair a-'anging' down like a 'oss's tail. They'll tear the gownd hoff a woman's back, and shy bricks, an' a dozen on 'em will go in at one, hif he's a-fightin' wi' their pal an' is a-lickin' on 'im, or heven hif 'e ain't—an' the men's as bad for that. Yes, the Henglish fights, but they fights proper, two and two, an' they knows what they's fightin' for, an' they doesn't screech like them wild Hirish—they's wuss than the cats. No, it ain't horfen as Hirish hinter-

feres wi' Henglish hif the Henglish doesn't worret 'em. Why should they? What call 'as sich as them to come hover 'ere to take the bread hout o' the mouth of them as 'as a right to 't?'

Bessie's superciliously uncharitable comments on Irish character were suddenly interrupted by an expression of surprise at the number of churches she saw rising around her through the sun-gilt grey smoke. 'Law, what a sight o' churches! Blessed if that ain't St Paul's!' When Bessie had once found an object which she could recognize, she soon picked out others that she was familiar with—the Mansion House, the Bank, the Exchange, 'the Gate,' as she called Billingsgate, the Custom House, the Tower, &c. 'Law, 'ow queer it looks hup 'ere!' she constantly kept on exclaiming. The sensation of seeing a stale sight from a novel stand-point seemed to give her more pleasurable excitement than anything she had yet experienced on this to her eventful day. Instead of leaving her to enjoy her treat, and the new experiance to teach, on however small a scale, its own lesson, I foolishly again attempted to moralize.

'Yes, Bessie,' I said, 'things and people, too, look very differently according to the way they are looked at. You have been taught to hate the Irish, but if you could see them as some people see them, perhaps you would like them—if you could see them as God sees them, from a higher place than the Monument, you would love them.'

'Granny says they're nasty beasts,' was Bessie's sullen answer.

Yes, Granny has been taught to call them so, just as

she teaches you ; but if Granny, too, would look at them differently she would speak of them differently.'

'I don't see as Hirish is much worth lookin' at, any 'ow.'

'Well, but Bessie, you said the churches, and the shops, and so on, that you've seen all your life, looked so different up here.'

'They don't look a bit nicer,' Bessie answered sharply, having at last got a dim glimpse of my meaning. 'I'd rayther see the shop windows than them nasty chimbley pots ;' and, fairly floored, I once more desisted from my very lame attempt at teaching by analogy.

'Now, the river do look nice,' Bessie went on in triumph, as if pursuing her argument. 'But law, what mites o' thinx the bridges looks hup 'ere ! My ! hif that ain't a steamer, an' there's a sojer hin it, I can see 'is red coat. It look jist like a fly a-puffin' about in a sarcer. Look at them barges, sir, wi' the brown sails, ain't that nice ? Hif I worn't a gal, I'd go in a barge. It 'ud be so jolly to doss a-top o' the 'ay an' stor an' that, and not 'ave no walkin'. Ah, them's the docks—there where the ships is as hif they couldn't git hout. Yes, I've been in the docks—not horfen. They stops sich as me, and hif you do git hinside, they feels you hover when you comes out, as hif ye'd been a-priggin'. No, I never did nuffink o' that ; Granny oodn't let me if I'd a mind, an' I shouldn't like to git locked up in the station-'us. Blessed hif the 'osses doesn't look as hif they was a-crawlin' on their bellies like black beadles ! An' there's a gal a-shakin' a carpet in that yard, an' now there's a cove

a-kissin' on 'er ! He's cut in now, 'cos an old ooman 'as come hout. That's the gal's missis, I guess, but I don't think *she* seed 'im. Law, what jolly larks you might 'ave on this 'ere moniment, watchin' the folks without their knowin' on it. If they was to put a slop hup 'ere he could see 'em a-priggin', but then he couldn't git down time enough to nail 'em.'

'But God can always see us, Bessie, and reach us, too, when we do wrong.'

'Then why don't He? What's the good o' the pollis? P'raps, though, God don't like to see the bobbies a-drivin' poor folk about. Granny says they're hawful 'ard on poor folk.'

I had again been unfortunate. Of course it would have been easy to answer poor little Bessie with satisfaction to myself; but as I felt that it would be only with satisfaction to myself, I was the more dissatisfied that in my 'prentice attempts to sow faith in divine government, I should have generated doubts. As the best thing I could do under the circumstances, I tried to remove Bessie's prejudice against the police as a body, although I was disagreeably conscious that, owing to my clumsiness, I had mixed up the 'station-'us' and Providence in a very bewildering fashion in my little hearer's mind.

'Are the police hard to you, Bessie?' I asked.

'Some on 'em is—wery,' she answered.

'Well, Bessie, it was Sergeant Hadfield, that lodges at Mr Wilson's, who told me where to find you. He spoke quite kindly about you. If it hadn't been for him, you wouldn't have had your fun up here.'

'I never said nuffink agin *'im.*'

'But if one policeman is kind, why shouldn't others be?'

'P'raps they may be, but there's a many as ain't.'

Bessie was a very obstinate little reasoner; and when I parted from her in Monument Yard, I could not help contrasting with bitter humiliation the easiness of calling and fancying one's self a Christian teacher of Christianity, and the difficulty of acquitting one's self as such. Little Creases will turn up again in these loosely strung jottings. I will only add here in reference to her, that I walked home to my lodgings puzzling over those words of the child-loved Lover of children, 'For of such is the kingdom of heaven.' There seemed somehow an incongruity between them and the precociously shrewd, and yet lamentably ignorant, little Bessie; and yet I felt that the poor little Londoner must be as dear to Jesus as any Judæan boy or girl He ever blessed.

III.

MY FIRST DEATHBED.

WHEN I reached my lodgings, I had scarcely put my latch-key into the key-hole before the door opened, and there stood Mrs Wilson nerving herself for an oratorical effort.

‘Haskin’ your parding, sir’ (it is needless to say that Mrs Wilson was not Scotch), ‘me an’ Wilson will take it kind if you won’t bring any more of your poor people into our first-floor. We has little uns, an’ so has the sergeant, an’ there’s no sayin’ where them dirty critturs comes from, or what fevers they brings with them. And hif you *will* hexcuse me, sir, it ain’t respectable to see sich as them goin’ in an’ out of a honest tradesman’s ’ouse.’

It was plainly the dread of social, rather than sanitary contagion that had prompted worthy little Mrs Wilson to this bold speech—bold for her, in spite of the repeated apologies, since she was a great reverencer of the clergy. Both her pleas, however, were so plausible that I pro-

mised to remember in future that I was not dwelling under my own roof. I could see that the little woman had been expecting opposition from the way in which she brightened up.

‘I’m sure I’m much obliged to you, sir, an’ so is Wilson, for he wouldn’t like to lose you as a lodger, sir, though he don’t belong to the Church; an’ I ’ope you’ll hexcuse the liberty. “It’s wery kind o’ Mr B——, an’ that we can’t deny,” says I to Mrs ’Adfield. “An’ nobody wants to deny it, Mrs Wilson, ma’am,” says she to me, “he’s a dear good gentleman to look after sich as them, but then you see, Mrs Wilson, ma’am, both you and me is mothers.” Oh, deary me, sir, I ought to have given this to you at once. The vicar’s servant brought it an hour ago, and it’s marked to be delivered immediate.’

What Mrs Wilson handed me was a note from the vicar, stating that a woman had just called at his house with a request that a clergyman would go to see a young person who was dying at hers; the vicar added that he knew nothing of the case, that he could not possibly go himself, owing to an inevitable engagement, and, giving the address, asked me to start at once to see the poor creature.

‘Do you know Sutton Place, Mrs Wilson?’ I inquired.

‘Oh yes, sir—it’s that quiet little street, with the neck like a bottle, that runs out o’ Grimes Street, and leads to nowhere. There’s a wall at the bottom with “Try Boag’s Blacking,” in big white letters on it. You can see ’em as you go along Grimes Street. One o’ the boys shall go with you, or Wilson will, an’ I’ll mind the shop.’

But I knew Grimes Street, and felt sure that in so short a street I could not fail to find Sutton Place after Mrs Wilson's description. It proved to be one of those double rows of modern houses that get squeezed into previously unoccupied spaces between older houses in London—the new not looking even as substantial as the old, and squalid with a drearier ready-made squalor—making you think somehow of poor little babies that ought to have been born fresh as dew, but *have* been born scarred by the sins that their fathers and grandfathers have committed. The roadway was unpaved, pitted, and littered with all kinds of rubbish; and intermittent little reaches of cracked and crumbling kerbstone were the only sign that footpaths had ever been thought of there. The cramped little two-floored drab houses looked more mildewedly miserable than the smoky, indistinguishably-red-brick houses around them. But Sutton Place could boast of one proof of 'gentility,'—there was not a 'shop' in it. A dress-maker's fly-spitten card hung over one fly-spitten muslin blind; over another of brown Holland hung a tailor's announcement that 'Gentlemen's own materials' were 'elegantly made up within;' from the lintel of one door protruded a painting of a mangle; one wire-blind, upside down, bore the tarnished gilt name of somebody, agent for some insurance company, but that had evidently been bought second or seventh hand. Most of the houses, even my limited acquaintance with London life enabled me to see, were sub-let, in floors or rooms, furnished and unfurnished, to lodgers.

A slatternly woman, with a very smutty face, answered

my knock at No. 9. Making her face still smuttier by smearing it with her greasy, grimy apron, she said sulkily, 'You're the parson, I s'pose,' and ushered me up-stairs. The bed, and the blind, and a box were almost the only furniture of the back-room I entered. 'Yes, she've sold her things, poor crittur,' said the landlady, noticing my glance round the unexpected bareness of the room; 'an' she've paid me honest up till next Saturday. I will say that, though I needn't, an' it's a deal o' bother 'avin' folks dyin' that way in your 'ouse. Of course, the parish must bury her, an' look arter the boy; but it ain't pleasant to a woman as works 'ard to pay her way to 'ave folks dyin' in their 'ouse like that. Some would ha' got 'er out afore this—pinchin' herself as she did; but I 'adn't the 'eart to do it, when the rent was al'ays ready some'ow. I never lost a penny by the poor crittur—that I will say—an' she'll be gone afore Saturday.'

On the bed lay a terribly emaciated young woman. Her face was so completely skin and bone that in one sense it was horrible to look at; and yet there was something in it that made me think the poor creature had once been very handsome. The long brown hair that bulged down upon her angular shoulder, and spread like a flood over the scanty bed-clothes, was very silky. The almost transparent hand that drooped at the bedside, was beautifully formed. A wedding-ring was on its proper finger, but only kept from falling on the floor by the crooking of the second joint. It seems heartless, somehow, to give these details, but I saw them far more quickly than I have written them down. When the landlady saw me

glance at the fourth finger, she said glibly, 'Oh yes, sir, there's no doubt she's an honest woman—a lady, too, I reckon, once upon a time—though that's all the gold she's got about her now, I'll go bail. I'll sec, though, she's buried in it. The parish shan't 'ave it.'

On the box sat a handsome frightened little boy, sobbing as if he would choke at every breath he caught. He looked sickly, but not with the gaunt look of his mother; and, though his clothes showed signs of wear, they were what is called 'good' in material and cut. 'Mamma won't speak to me,' he sobbed, when I put my hand upon his shoulder.

When I stooped over his mamma, I thought at first that her soul had already fled; yet a minute afterwards her big blue eyes opened, dim at first, but the film seemed to be shrivelled up by the brightness that shot through it, and she gaspingly whispered, 'Pray—pray—pray!'

My thumb was in my Prayer-Book at the Visitation of the Sick, and, hastily kneeling down, I began with the first prayer my eye fell on: 'O Father of mercies, and God of all comfort, our only help in time of need; We fly unto Thee for succour in behalf of this Thy servant, here lying——' But as I said it, a strange wild light—half-greeting and half-yearning farewell—came into the young creature's eyes. Her boy rushed to her, and clutched her as if her body as well as its spirit were being wrenched from him. 'God bless—be a good—' she stammered; and as she tried to fling her arms round his neck, her head fell back upon the flabby pillow, with an awfully beautiful smile upon the blue pinched lips.

IV.

MR JONES.



O doctor had attended the poor creature. At the inquest the coroner severely censured the landlady for not sending for one.

'Sich is the hingratitude o' human natur, sir,' remarked the woman, indignantly, when we met outside ; 'an' me as give the young person a cup o' tea the last Saturday as ever was. I 'on't grudge it 'er, though, pore dear. Arter all, she did die as pleasant as a party could, consid'rin' the succumstinces.'

There is something so awful in the thought of a human being 'starved to death' in the midst of millions of fellow-creatures in the richest city in the world, that juries shrink from returning that literal verdict. In this case there was the usual periphrasis about some *itis* or other, 'accelerated by insufficient nourishment.' There could be small doubt, however, that the poor young thing *had* been literally starved to death on that bright day when even the dingy

street-markets looked like overflowing horns of plenty, as the golden sunlight fell on their stalls high-heaped with summer produce. Little else was elicited in reference to her at the inquest. That her name was Emily Smithers, that she appeared to have 'known better days,' and to have been deserted by her husband, and that for three or four years she had 'supported' herself and her little Fred by sempstress-work, shoe-binding, and the other precarious shifts to which women 'brought up to nothing' have to resort when they find themselves friendless and moneyless in London, and have discovered that their poor, mediocre little playing, singing, painting, &c., which once secured them so many compliments, are absolutely worthless as bread-winners. That was what the non-medical evidence came to.

Little Fred would have fallen to the care of the parish, had not one of the jurors put in a claim for him. This was an old man of the name of Jones, dusty and dried up as a withered walnut. His face was thatched with a yellowish red wig, whose eaves came down almost to his eyebrows. He was the only jurymen of whom I knew anything; and what I knew had not prepossessed me in his favour. He sold birds, &c., and I had bought my hedgehog of him, and had had to pay, as I thought, a very exorbitant price for it. The questions he asked and the remarks he made at the inquest, moreover, had increased my prejudice against him. I thought him a hard, grasping little man, with about as much milk of human kindness in him as the wrinkled walnut he so much resembled had juice. To Mr Jones, however, the parish

authorities willingly gave up little Fred, then between four and five. But this willingness did not reassure me. Of course, they were glad to ease the rates anyhow, I reasoned.

I determined to make inquiries about this Mr Jones. When I made them of Mrs Wilson, she answered :—

‘The bird-shop man in Grimes Street, sir, do you mean, where you bought that nasty thing that’s al’ays gettin’ into the children’s beds, if you’ll hexcuse me, sir? He ain’t a sociable kind o’ man, but his bark ’s a deal wuss than his bite, I’ve heard say. He’s ’ard at a bargain; but, law, if you’re soft enough to give people what they ask, what’s to become on yer in London? But Mr Jones ain’t a bad man, sir. He’s done a many kind things to my knowledge; an’ if *he’s* took the little boy, he’ll hact fair by ’im; an’ it ain’t a bad thing for the little chap, for Jones ’as got money in the bank, though he do look sich an old guy. I wonder ’is birds ain’t afeard on ’im; ain’t he like a scarecrow? But we mustn’t go by folkses’ looks, as you were a-sayin’ last Sunday, sir, but judge righteous judgment; an’ I think Jones ain’t a bad man, though nobody can say he is a beauty, an’ he *is* al’ays a-runnin’ on agin women. That’s because he couldn’t git any one to ’ave ’im, I expect. Any’ow, he hain’t got chick nor child ’cept them he’s got in his shop. If he takes to the little boy, he’ll do well by ’im, you may depend on that, sir.’

A day or two after this conversation I turned into Grimes Street to see how little Fred was getting on. I found him, dressed in a neat though coarse tunic of black

stuff, sitting in a great cage outside the shop, and playing happily with two little black-and-tan spaniels that were the other occupants of the barred cage or kennel. Besides the dogs, a couple of dirty, depressed swans in a packing-case, were exposed for sale outside, a coop or two of poultry, some white and grey and purple and cinnamon-coloured pigeons, a blackbird in a wicker-cage, a hutchful of white and sandy rabbits, and a bowl of gold and silver fish, whose flashing sides contrasted queerly with the dull brass trellis-work that covered the globe's mouth. A chained cockatoo moped on its perch in the doorway, putting up its sulphur-hued, serrated crest angrily when I went by. The shop-windows and the shop-walls were lined with little cages in which larks, linnets, goldfinches, chaffinches, bullfinches, greenfinches, thrushes, canaries, redpoles, and blackcaps were singing, twittering, and springing and dropping from perch to perch. On the counter there was a trayful of still, semi-torpid tortoises; above the parlour-door a squirrel on the treadmill; and here and there a cage of rats or pink-eyed ferrets; a parrot or two, three or four starlings, a magpie, whose once glossy black and white were as rusty as a ship's paint after a long voyage; half-a-dozen guinea-pigs, a fox, a brace of dozing old owls and four young owls huddling together, and looking sleepier and sulkier even than their elders, were other members of the menagerie; more empty cages and bundles of wool and artificial moss drooped from the ceiling; and Mr Jones was mixing German paste in his shirt-sleeves.

‘Servant, sir.

“Will you walk into my parlour?”
Said the spider to the fly.
“’Tis the prettiest little parlour
That ever you did spy,”

was his eccentric greeting, as he motioned me into a little room behind the shop, almost choked with ferns and flowers and birds and beasts, living and stuffed.

In a cramped little backyard, on which the window gave, there were more birds and beasts; three or four sluttish ducks, that were dipping their bills into a shallow dish of water in the middle of the yard, looking especially melancholy prisoners.

You was at the inquest, I remember,’ he went on, when we had seated ourselves. ‘Come to look after the boy, I suppose? He’ll do, poor little chap—he’s jolly enough now—p’raps you saw him as you come by. I thought he’d cry his eyes out, though, at the funeral. I got him rigged somehow, and took him. Though what rubbish that black is, sir, if what you preach is true.’

‘I am very glad to hear you come to church.’

‘I don’t come to church, sir, and I’m not ashamed to tell you so; but I expect I know more about those kind of things than a good many of them as do go to church. If you think your friends has gone to glory, why should you go on as if God had robbed you? And if you don’t think your friends has gone to glory, what’s the good of makin’ yourself more dumpish than ever with those gloomy things, and pulling down your blinds, and that? Not but what three parts of it is all humbug. People are proud of their new black togs, and nicely they run

into debt to get 'em. More fools they—widows and such—when they want every penny they can scrape together to keep 'em. They're half afraid that the neighbours should think they weren't fond o' their dear departed. It diverts their thoughts, though, all that funeral fuss—and it keeps the undertakers goin' ; so p'r'aps there's some good in it. Anyhow, I must be fool enough to put a band on my hat and buy a black suit ready-made to go to that poor young thing's buryin'. I got some black togs run up for the kid, too—what he's got on is only for him to knock about in. I don't think much o' women as a rule, but it was cuttin' somehow to see that poor young creature round the corner, when we went to view the body ; and to hear that poor little feller a-tellin' his little story. How the poor little chap did blubber—for all he's gammocking now. I thought I should ha' blubbered too. I don't like big lads—they're almost as bad as women ; but I do like little kids. When I was puttin' that there little Fred in along wi' the dogs to please him, I had a comical thought. He looked so pretty, I wondered the angels—if there is angels—didn't ketch little boys an' gals an' keep 'em as we keep goldfinches.'

'But what do you think of doing with the boy?'

'Oh, I haven't bothered my head about that yet. I'll send him to school by-and-by, but just now I let him amuse hisself, and he amuses me, for it was lonesome sometimes not to have a soul to speak to when the shop was shut except the birds and things and my old Black Pete, and he's deaf and dumb.'

'Black Pete ! who is he?'

‘He’s my man of all work, sir—an old bachelor like myself—and we get on together famous. I wouldn’t have a woman in the house, not if you paid me, much less pay ’em wages. I never buy a talkin’ parrot if I can help it—they’re so much like women, for ever pratin’ about what they don’t understand, an’ then puttin’ their heads a-one side as if they was thinkin’ “ain’t it wonderful such a handsome thing as me can talk so sensible?” Pete and Fred have taken to each other (but Fred likes me best), and we shall manage famous now—ain’t this a pretty place, sir?’

‘I certainly didn’t expect to find such a place here.’

‘It don’t seem like London, do it, with the flowers a-blowin’ an’ the birds a-singin’? I was al’ays fond o’ the country—I used to go out bird-ketchin’ afore I got this shop, and every Sunday afternoon, when I’ve put up the shutters, I go out for a tramp somewheres.’

‘You do keep open in the morning, then?’

‘Yes, because then’s when I get most customers.’

‘But you’ll let the boy go to church? I am sure his mother would wish it.’

‘All right, sir, and to Sunday-school, too, in the mornin’, since, p’raps, as you say, his poor mother would ha’ wished it; but I can’t have him stived up on the hot afternoons. That seems to me to be a queer way to try to make youngsters like religion—settin’ ’em tasks on the day o’ rest, an’ keepin’ ’em frizzlin’ in a chokin’ school-room like sassengers in a fryin’-pan. Though I make my livin’ by birds, I don’t like to see the little beggars—them as has known what liberty is—cooped up on such a day

as this. If I could afford it, I'd let 'em all out—'cept the foreign birds, and the canaries, and the mules, and the t'others I've bred.'

'By all means let the little fellow have as much fresh air as you can give him, but you must remember that his heart and his mind want fresh air as well as his lungs. He is a solemn charge—all the more, rather than the less, because you have taken it on yourself. You mustn't neglect him, Mr Jones.'

'You needn't be afraid that I shall corrupt the boy's morals, sir. I don't drink, and I don't swear, and if my notions about some things ain't like yours, I shan't talk about 'em to the boy till he's old enough to judge for hisself. You teach him what you like on Sunday mornin's, and I'll take him for a country walk the rest o' the day, and tell him what I know about what he sees. That can't do no hurt. If the same God made the world and the Bible, one on 'em can't make you think less o' the other, to my thinkin'. I do believe that God made a good bit o' the world, but I seem to myself, when I think about it, to be a queer bit o' work to be turned out by Him as made the stars. But there's worse puzzles in the Bible. You read the Sermon on the Mount, and then you read one o' them cursin' Psalms. I've read that them as wrote the Bible was only God's pens. So I could understand that there should be a difference in the writin'—a quill pen don't write like a steel pen—but the meanin' ought to be more alike, to my thinkin'.'

'But, Mr Jones, let me—'

'No, sir, we won't get into a argeyment, if you please.

D

There's no good in argeyment—it gets your blood up like boxin'. All that you want to do is to floor the t'other feller, an' in argeyment there's nothin' to keep you from hittin' below the belt, an' kickin' him when he's down. I look about me, and I read, and I think, and p'raps I shall find out the rights o' things some day; p'raps I shan't; p'raps there *is* no rights o' things, and one man's notion is as good as another's, because none on 'em is any good—just his fancy. Anyhow, argeyment never did me any good. A man don't like to have to knock under. Why, even when I've been readin' a book, that can't crow over you, and I've come across somethin' that didn't suit my notions, and yet, just at the time, I couldn't think how I'd answer what it said, if it was a man talkin' to me, I've sent the book flyin'. You've got your ways o' thinkin', sir, and I've got mine; and we'll keep 'em, till we can get better. Argeyment won't do no good. We should be just where we was before, and worse friends, perhaps. It ain't often I let out what I think. Most of the people I've to do with don't think any more about such things than them parrots, and such as fancy they do know somethin' would scream and answer like them parrots. I don't say you are such as that, sir, but I know all you've got to say, and that you must say it because you're a parson, just as you'd have to cry, "Dust, hoy!" if you was a dustman.'

'That's rather hard, Mr Jones; but, as a means of getting to understand each other better, I will let you have your say to-day.'

'Why, ain't it fair that I should say what I've got to say,

without hearin' what you've got to answer? It's what you parsons do every Sunday, and now, perhaps, you can understand a bit how savage that makes them as thinks for theirselves. No, sir, as I said afore, we'll have no argeyment. I never asked you to make my acquaintance, but if you like to come here now and then to look after the boy, you're welcome ; and if you please to have a chat with me, you're welcome ; but what's the good o' argeyment? It's only confusin' to the faculties. Now, sir, sometimes when I'm smokin' in here, all by myself, without any one to throw me off the track with their but-thises an' but-thats, it's surprisin' how clear I seem to see things. If you'd like to make up your sermons here now and then, you're welcome. I can lend you a Bible and a Prayer-book, too. Though I don't believe all that's in 'em, I'm very fond o' readin' both. If you're country-bred, the flowers and the birds will cheer you up a bit when your stomach's turned by what you'll see, and hear, and smell in the holes you'll have to go into, if you try to do your duty.'

V.

RUS IN URBE.

IN spite of the fragrance of Mr Jones's flowers, the foetor of his ferrets, &c., was too powerful to permit his 'Russian Herby,' as he called it, to be considered, by persons possessed of normal noses, a very enjoyable retirement ; and, since bursts of song were very rare amongst his birds, the chirping, clucking, cackling, croaking, snarling, growling that were the dominant tones of his menagerie made the notion of sermon-writing in his back parlour a very funnily 'fond imagination.' Nevertheless, I often found my way thither. I was interested in little Fred at starting, and I became interested in Black Pete, the deaf and dumb man Friday whom the East End Robinson Crusoe had saved from starvation and broken into his uses. I became still more interested in the Crusoe. Being invariably stopped whenever I attempted a defence of the 'way of thinking' which he rather flouted with sly digs

and back-hand blows than directly assaulted, I desisted from all attempts to get up an 'argeyment,' and soon found that I had all the better chance of occasionally bringing in my modes of thought without contradiction, in a similar parenthetical manner.

Mr Jones's dislike of an argument is not uncommon, I have found, amongst those who hold analogous views; but I have learned not to attribute it, as I am afraid a good many of us do, to conscious insincerity of professed belief.

Amongst his neighbours, Mr Jones—originally, perhaps, of not the blindest of tempers—had hardened into what I found him. He was not uniformly gracious when I called. Sometimes I was not allowed to enter the 'Russian Herby,' but when I did find admittance there, he was courteous enough. To little Fred and Black Pete, so far as I could see and hear, he was always kind; and so he was to his live stock. Of some of his birds and beasts he made such pets that, keen after money though he was, he could be barely civil to customers who took a fancy to them. Others he would not have parted with on any consideration. These he called his lords, because they were raised to the upper house—another name he gave his parlour; those left in the shop being his commons. It was a curious sight to come upon the whole queer Happy Family (for Black Pete took his meals with his master) taking their tea together in the grove of ferns, fuchsias, geraniums, stocks, mignonettes, musks, balsams, creeping Jennys, and spider-plants, with here and there a tall arum hanging its glossy flag over the

jungle like a banana, and lighting up the green gloom with its alabaster lamp-like blossom. The old man generally read at tea-time ; and, whilst he read, two or three tame canaries would flutter about amongst the plants, and then perch themselves on his head or his shoulders, sway on his paper, alight on his book, and crane over, looking as wise as if they could read print upside down, clatter about on the tea-tray, and peck at his knuckles and the sugar-basin, hiding behind it like children playing at 'whoop' when he chanced to look up. Meanwhile a tame rat sat at his foot, drumming or nibbling at the boot to attract his attention, and then squatting on its haunches to beg. The old man's human *protégés*, the golden-haired, fair-skinned little-boy, and the grizzly-woolled negro, were not so familiar with their patron, but they were equally fond of him.

Black Pete had been for years with his master, and yet he still looked at him with eyes that caressed him like a dog's. This poor fellow, Mr Jones had found wandering in the East India Road, hungry and almost naked, followed by a crowd of boys who were teasing him with the cruel gusto which I am afraid not poor boys alone are apt to feel when they have got hold of any creature larger than themselves that they can torment with perfect impunity. The bird-seller took the negro home, and he had lived with him ever since. Black Pete, as his master named him, had never been taught to 'talk on his fingers,' and from the signs he made, it was only possible to guess at his previous history. By means of signs, however, he and his master were soon able to communicate sufficiently

for their needs, and the negro became a very handy help to his benefactor. Mr Jones did not for a moment profess to have been actuated solely by philanthropy in housing the black, and I credited him with all the more benevolence because he made no fuss about it. The bird-seller to the last did not give up the hope of teaching Pete to speak articulately. He had taught starlings to talk, he said, and it was hard if he could not teach a man.

At odd leisure times he and Pete used to make mouths at each other with a patient persistency that was comico-pathetic, but though Pete did his best to imitate the twitchings of his teacher's lips, no sound came from his, and he moved about almost the only silent member of that noisy household.

He never cared to go far beyond the threshold of the shop, on his own account, owing to his dread of the street-boys; but he would venture out to take little Fred for a walk, and sometimes carry him for miles. Within-doors he let Fred do as he liked with him, grinning at all the child's little tyrannies as if they had been most condescending favours. If Fred had been a princeling, instead of an orphan fed by charity, he could not have had a more obsequious attendant. The tall, black, dumb man trotted after the little fellow like a huge Newfoundland dog, as he made the rounds—delighted as if he had been in a fairy palace—of the shop, the parlour, the kitchen, the cellar, the yard, the bed-rooms, the dark loft where the pigeons were bred, and the grimy roof with the black 'dormer' on it, and the smoky scarlet runners 'growing' in cracked, oblong, wooden boxes in the roof-gutter: every

part of the house made more or less delicious to a child's taste by the presence of animals of some kind.

When Fred was taken ill, Black Pete for once turned mutinous. He could be got to do nothing, night or day, but wait on and watch over his little pet. He would not leave the child's bedside, except to get something he saw, or was made to believe, that the child wanted.

When the boy recovered sufficiently to come downstairs again, Pete still kept close to him, until he was quite well. He nursed him on his knee, he walked about with him in his arms, he brought him shells off the mantel-shelf, he hoisted him on his shoulder that he might be able to look into the cages at which he pointed, and into the eyes of 'Spring'—the first of a set of old-fashioned engravings, 'The Four Seasons,' which adorned the walls of Russian Herby. Spring had a hooped petticoat and a tiny straw hat, but there was something about the mouth which was a little like poor Emily Smithers, and so, perhaps, poor little Fred liked to look at it because it dimly reminded him of his dead mother. But Pete probably only thought that Fred was very fond of pictures of beautiful ladies. He slipped out mysteriously one evening. He slipped back as mysteriously, and busied himself in the kitchen for an hour or two. He was pasting into a rough album he had made of folded and cut newspaper a large assortment of glaringly coloured prints of female theatrical characters and a few faded engravings of female faces which, by dint of much pointing and the expenditure of all his pocket money, he had procured, as Mr Jones heard afterwards, at a shop about

a mile off. That was a long way for Pete to venture by himself, but his wish to gratify Fred made the poor dumb negro brave. He was rewarded for his trouble and his risk. I chanced to look into the back parlour next day a few minutes after the album had been produced. Fred sat upon Pete's knee as the black turned over the leaves, and it was hard to say which had the happier face. Curiously enough, the first engraving which Pete had pasted in was one of the virgin mother nursing the infant Jesus.

When Fred quite recovered, he still made so much of Black Pete, that Mr Jones grew rather jealous. Both of his *protégés*, he thought, had deposed him from the first place in their hearts.

'Kids are queer 'uns, ain't they, sir?' he said to me one day. 'You'd ha' thought, from the way the little chap took on when his mother died, that he'd never ha' got over it, but cut away to the churchyard after her with the tears on his cheeks. I'm a grumpy old fellow, I know; but I can understand feelings, if I can't feel 'em. That's a beautiful bit in the Bible about Jacob—"But he refused to be comforted, an' he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mournin'." That sounds nateral. I can fancy that when them you're really fond of is gone, you feel angry that anybody should think you'll ever stop cryin'. But, you see, he got over it—an' that's nateral too. But there Fred was, as if he'd melt like salt when his poor ma died, an' then he took up with the span'els, an' was quite content, an' then he took up wi' me, an' now he's took up wi' Black Pete, an' none of us can

be a bit like what that poor young mother of his was. I don't say it ain't rightly ordered that things should be so ; but still it do seem hard, even to a old bear like me, that folks should be so soon forgotten by them as they cared most for.'

VI.

REST FOR THE HEAVY LADEN.

AT one time I did duty at a Refuge for the Destitute, or 'straw-yard,' to borrow the phrase of those who received its benefits. I have witnessed many such a scene since, perhaps even more painful scenes, but never before had I had the homelessness that there is to be found in London so brought home to me, as when I first saw the crowd of outcasts whose one great object in life was to put off death a little longer by obtaining the shelter of that rough asylum. That first impression lingers with me yet. I do not believe that one's heart, like one's muscle, gets harder through exercise. Those really have the deepest pity who have pitied most. But still the *eye* gets accustomed to the saddest sights, and, after even a brief familiarity with wide-spread woe, glances with apparent callousness at objects which would once have riveted it in horror. I remember going through the worst part of one of my

parishes with one of the best men whom I have ever known—a parishioner who for years had been going about doing good amongst the poor people, in whose midst his place of business was planted; and also with a young lady-friend of his who had been passingly ‘interested’ by what he had told her of those poor people. He went his rounds as usual—sometimes saying a kindly cheerful, sometimes as kindly sharp a word to those he met; but not looking in the least excited. His young friend, on the other hand, was in a state of hysterical emotion all the way. When we got out of the slums, the girl, who had done nothing for the poor, thus addressed the man, who had done so much, ‘Oh, Mr —, I could not have believed before that you were *so hard-hearted!*’

To return to the straw-yard. My technical ‘duty’ there was to read prayers and say a few words to the inmates on Sunday morning. Very lame words they were at first—I felt lost without my sermon-case. I do not mean to say that—leaving out of the question the few preachers of any denomination who have a natural gift of oratory—I do not consider the bulk of written sermons superior to the bulk of ‘extemporized’ sermons in grammar, logic, and good taste—and not a whit more ‘dull’ to popular taste, save when the extemporizer rants; but I do say that I think it a pity that we of the Church of England are not somehow trained, instead of having to train ourselves after we have entered on our charges, to speak a few simple sentences without book and without stammering.

On the Saturday evening before my first ‘duty’ at the

straw-yard, I went to find it out. The Refuge—the patched and whitewashed ground-floor and first-floor of a dilapidated pile of begrimed drab brick, which seemed to have been once used as sugar-works—stood in a *cul de sac*; but as soon as I got to the corner of the blind lane, I knew where I was. The lane was choked with ragged applicants waiting for the Refuge door to open. The lamp that shone above it was the only lamp in the lane, and it was the only harbour-light in the wide world for a good many of those poor creatures. ‘Noblest things find vilest using’—charities that are intended to save from starvation men and women who long for work, are fastened on by men and women who would scarcely work to save their lives, and also by some who have work that would, at any rate, support them. In that tattered crowd, I was afterwards told, there was a considerable leaven of incorrigible tramps, who had flocked to London winter-quarters after, to them, most pleasant country tours; and there were Irish there, I was also informed, who might have money sewn up in their filthy rags, but yet had come to the Refuge to secure for themselves and their children eleemosynary rations—extra on Sundays. The whole crowd, however, looked most miserable; and I have no doubt that the majority consisted of those who, for a time, were utterly dead-beat in the race of life—who, but for that resting-place, could never have plucked up heart and strength to run the race again, however feebly. Almost every one I saw was most wretchedly clad. The material, in most cases, was as thin as the quantity was scanty. In a good many, a single covering of limp, flimsy rags hung

from the body like the almost-shed bark of an Australian tree. There were babies there, almost bare, with nothing but mother's love and a flapping net-work of dirty calico to warm the blue breasts on which they pillowed their pinched cheeks. The whirling snow came dropping down, and melted into viscous mud. In the mud, like swamp-birds, stood wearied tramps, resting on one swollen foot, the less-chilblained of the two. To an Englishman's eye shoelessness always suggests the extremity of misery; but the bare-footed little Irish folk, paddling in the mire, seemed the least miserable of the throng. The men and women who sat along the kerb-stones, with stockingless toes sprouting out of their burst boots, looked far more doleful. Standing and sitting on the narrow pavements, lolling thick and weariedly against the walls on both sides of the lane, crowded in the muddy roadway, the outcasts of both sexes, all ages, and a good many countries, were congregated. As a rule, the poor creatures were as sullenly silent—so far as words went—as half-frozen cattle clustered, tail to tail, and head over shoulders, in the corner of a mistily rimy field. Most of the babies even had been stupefied into silence by the cold. Now and then an unstupefied infant raised a piteously shrill and clamorous scream, but a chorus of 'churchyard coughs,' with churchyard solos between, was the chief audible proof of the miserable crowd's presence. There was no quarrelling. Common extremity had tamed the heterogeneous constituents of the throng into mutual forbearance, as wild beasts are tamed by flood and fire. And yet—so ineradicably has the good God, who gave the sea its count-

less smiles and the earth its songs of jubilee as innumerable, implanted mirth in the human heart—even here ‘a little chaffing—almost *sotto voce* ch ffling—was going on. The jests were often coarse ; but that starving folk could jest at all, struck me with wonderment, and, I hope, taught me wisdom. The most cheerful (if I may use such a word, even comparatively, in reference to such people) were, however, I must add, those who were sure of a night’s, of two nights’ lodging, because they were ticket-holders. Those who were not sure of admission regarded the ticket-holders with stagnant envy, as they muttered their stagnant appreciation of the sound roof and warm, sound sleep they had enjoyed the night before.

When the door was opened—throwing out a welcome gush of warm red light into the cold black lane—the ticket-holders crowded in, only stopping to be identified by the janitor. Their spirits rose and their tongues were thawed a little as soon as they got inside. They indulged in a little of the normal jostling of a London crowd, and ‘Here goes for first wash’ cried a voice or two as they made their way to the soap and water waiting for them in great tubs. It was not that they seemed to enjoy their washing, poor creatures—dirt had been too long their familiar—but they knew that they *must* wash before they could get their hunk of bread a-piece. ‘It’s perished with the cowl’d, I am—me an’ the childher. Sure ye’ll let us in at oncet, sir-r. Glory be your bed!’ whined an Irishwoman with a baby at her breast, and another at her back, and a little girl tugging at her skirt. ‘Sure ye know me, sir-r?’ ‘Oh yes, Biddy,’ answered the porter, ‘I know you well

enough—I *ought* to—but you've no ticket now, and you must take your turn.' 'Is it tickuts an' turruns that he's talkin' about?' the Irishwoman shouted then, suddenly ceasing to wheedle. 'It's becace I'm Oirish. Had thim he let in all tickuts? Divil a bit of it. He's English, an' so he favours his counthrymen.' Most of those who had to wait like Biddy, however, waited far more patiently. They closed up, as batch after batch of non-ticket-holders was admitted; but they still stood in silence, although thicker and thicker came down the whirling snow. The last admitted were quite white with snow when they got into the lobby, where they shook themselves like water-dogs, and stamped their bare feet and sodden boot-soles as even quiet horses will at last stamp their hoofs, if too long kept waiting, while a clerk entered the names, &c., of the applicants for admission in a bulky volume like a bank-ledger—a Book of Death in Life. These entries were dismal autobiographies in brief to turn over. The 'Country or Parish' column showed that from almost a' the airts the wind could blow luckless beings had been blown, from all parts of the globe, to beg for a crust in the world's richest city. In the column ironically headed 'Means of Living' there were also saddest items—long lists of callings that had proved broken reeds to their honest followers, and every here and there a dishonest calling which its follower had proclaimed without a blush. The names which some of the women had given themselves were horribly plain, and yet it was even sadder to read after a girl's name the euphemism 'Gay.' *Gay*, poor wretch, when she had come *there* to announce her gaiety; and the next column,

'Last Place of Abode,' declared that for many a night before the streets from which she vainly sought her bread had been her only resting-place. As I turned over that gloomy register, with the snow fast blinding the shutterless little window of the office in which I read the entries, it was literally blood-curdling to find how many of those then beneath the Refuge's roof had spent the previous, equally inclement, night in the open air. No wonder that, when they had performed their perfunctory washing, and snatched their quarter of half-a-quartern loaf from the piled bread-baskets, they ate as dogs eat, and basked before the roaring fires in the wards like cats. The fires had long been lighted, and so even those who could not get in front of them were still enabled to enjoy them—to drink in their heat at every pore, as a man almost dying of thirst drinks in water. To-night was not to be as yesternight. They were sure of a little food, and of warm shelter. To-morrow all were sure of food and shelter also, and Monday night as well might find a good many of them still there. The vagrants were perfectly satisfied, and even the beaten working-folk began to hope that work might turn up before Tuesday.

Before the women went to bed, the matron took me up into their ward on the first-floor. It was strangely quiet for a place crowded with women and children. The babies were snuggling and snoring, like little pigs, in the straw with which the Refuge bunks at that time were filled. The bigger little girls were nodding against their mothers' shoulders, or stretched across their mothers' laps. They had munched their own bread and, perhaps, had half of

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baby's grown-up ration, or shared with baby and mother a basin of exceptional gruel ; and now God's sweet sleep had come down on them as his dew comes down upon even the humblest flowers. The women still had a brooding look as they nursed their children on their knees, and stared at the red coals dropping in white flakes ; but the little ones were quiet at last, and *they* were resting, too, in their own way, and seemed to want to make the most of their conscious rest, before they sought forgetfulness under the dark rugs that covered the straw-filled bunks. Very few of the matrons and old women were talking. The little talk they indulged in was carried on almost in a whisper. Some of the younger women, of the tramp class, were rather noisy, and inclined to be saucy ; but their spirits were plainly damped by the atmosphere of general depression in which they found themselves. One young girl (*not* of the tramp class, although her dress was even scantier than theirs) sat on the board at the foot of her bunk, with her elbows on her knees, and her head clutched in her hands, staring into the air with the look of a timid creature driven fiercely mad by fear. Her ration of bread lay half-uneaten on her lap. 'If she turns up her nose at it, I won't,' said one of the tramp-girls ; 'it's a sin to waste good wittles, ain't it, sir?'—'specially when there's precious little on 'em goin'.' And as she spoke, the tramp ran off grinning to the fire with the uneaten crust. The other girl took no notice of her, and it was some time before I could get her to take any notice of me.

'You must put your trust in God, my poor girl,' I was

saying, for the third time, when she turned round sharply upon me with a half-savage, half-whimpering, 'I *have* put my trust in God, and what's come of it?' And then she flung herself back upon the straw, and kicked and bit and screamed in a fit of hysterics. The matron quieted her down at last, covered her up, and tucked her in. 'There, you lie still, my good girl—you'll be all right to-morrow. You go to sleep now, and forget all about it,' said the matron in a kindly authoritative tone. 'It's easy *saying* that, ain't it, sir?' she added. 'It's plain to see what *she'll* come to, poor girl; but she hasn't come to it yet, and I'll give her a kiss, poor thing. She looks somehow as if she'd a mother that used to make much of her, and mayhap it may comfort her. Oh, dear, what a lot of girls there is in London as are where their mothers wouldn't have them!' The poor girl put up her lips, like a baby, to be kissed, when the matron stooped over her; and then for a time her sobs became more convulsive than ever. 'Tut, tut—that's silly,' exclaimed the kindly-severe matron. 'You go to sleep like a good girl, and we'll have a talk to-morrow. If you keep on going on like that, I shall be half sorry I did it.' The girl gulped in her sobs like a chidden child, and in a few minutes was sleeping the deep, apparently dreamless, slumber which is sometimes given to the almost utterly miserable; which others, as miserable, often crave after with a frantic eagerness that deprives them of it for weeks together. 'She's country-bred, poor child,' said the matron, as we moved away from the coffin-like bunk. 'She must have come from somewhere about my parts, from the way she talks; and

a pretty girl she must have been when she'd flesh on her face. She looks a good girl, don't she, sir ; but I wonder how long she'll keep so. I've lived in London for many a year, and it's a wonderful place, but I can't like it yet. Think of the thousands of boys and girls it's been bringin' to grief for I don't know how long ! They fancy, poor things, they can better themselves in London, and very high and mighty they think themselves because they live in it, and their brothers and sisters in the country. But I'd sooner have a boy or girl of mine in their graves than in London, without me to look after them—poor lonely dears, with nobody caring twopence about them except to tempt them to go wrong, and fancying themselves so sharp when all the time they're so silly ! You'll have a talk with the poor girl to-morrow, won't you, sir ?'

When I re-entered the ward below, the men and boys had all turned in. The roar of the replenished fires, the singing of the gas, here and there turned down, the regular or broken breathing of the sleepers, and the footfalls of my companion, the officer in charge, and myself, were the only sounds that disturbed the silence of the long, low white room. In a few places the smoke of the gas had blurred the whitewash, a few initials and feebly-grotesque caricatures had been traced upon it with charred sticks, the fires chequered it with flickering shade ; but, for the most part, the ceiling, beams, props, and walls were far whiter than the snow outside.

Along the floor, however, stretched long lines of bunks with dark mounds above them like fresh-made graves. Sometimes a mound heaved, and a bare arm came out,

and clenched its fist, and gesticulated eerily. But the troubling dream passed over, the arm fell with sudden languor, and the dreamer once more breathed with tranquil regularity. Even on earth the weary, for a few hours, had found rest.

VII.

SUNDAY MORNING AT THE REFUGE.

WHEN I went back to the Refuge next morning the sun was shining in a pale, but still cloudless, blue sky. Even in the East End we have bright suns and blue skies far more frequently than our West End neighbours—so near to us and yet severed from us by so great a gulf—have any idea of. The church bells were ringing cheerfully in the frosty air. The viscous slush of the night before had been caked on the pavements into black and yellow glazed crust, which men and boys were still picking, and shovelling, and sweeping, into the roadway ; whilst others, with their tools over their shoulders, went about monotonously chanting ‘Sweep your doorway, mum?’ In front of some houses there was a funereal pall of ashes on the pavement—but still now and then, spread out like a sheet on roofs, furring mortar-lines and linen posts, and gathered in tiny drifts in corners, some genuine, unsullied, frost-crisped

snow was sparkling. To the well-housed, well-clad, well-fed there is scarcely a prettier or more inspiring sight ; but it is a shroud-like apparition to the London poor. A 'hard-frost' to them is a horror, however brightly the sun may shine upon it. There were sad hearts in many of the houses I passed on my way to the Refuge—houses with chimneys that sent forth no smoke, or, if they had fires, the feeblest fires, that were being squeezed to death between almost touching 'cheeks ;' but the Refuge people, in spite of the frost, had gained a little cheerfulness. They had awoke refreshed, an extra allowance of bread and a little cheese had been served out to them, they had a day of warm rest before them—this Sunday was a little island in their billowy life.

When they all mustered in the men's ward for service, it was touching to note the little attempts which some of the women had made at 'tidying themselves up' in honour of the day. The scarecrow rags had been made to look as trim and continuous as possible, hair had been reparted and smoothed down, and hands and faces carefully washed. The poor girl I had spoken to the night before was one of the congregation, but she was not one of those who had striven to smarten themselves. She sat as before, with her head between her hands, gazing into a future that was all black to her. Young as she was, the spring of her hope seemed broken.

It was a strange congregation that I had that day. In front of a knot of Irish, who had drawn off scowling, grinned a colony of tramps, who regarded all religions with the impartiality of ignorant indifference, and were

looking forward to the service as a change, or, in their own term, 'a lark.' Many a nominal creed, at any rate, because many a country, had, however, its representative or representatives there. Beside a heavy-footed, mild-eyed Essex ploughman crouched a wicked-eyed, lithe Lascar, looking very much like a viper that would spring as soon as it should be quite thawed out of its torpor. There were two Chinamen, who had nothing but their thin blue calico jumpers to keep the keen wind from goose-skinning their lemon-coloured bodies, when again turned out to its tender mercies. Black and brown faces of the negro type blotched the mass of lighter countenances with round dots like music notes. The large majority of those present belonged, of course, to the British Isles; but the Register showed that amongst my hearers there were natives of every division of the globe—five countries of continental Europe having contributed their quotas, and Africa being represented not only by negroes, but also by a bankrupt Algerine. Amongst the English was a university man, whom drink had brought down to seek, and seek in vain, for labour at the Docks. He was not the only one of the Refuge's inmates whom drink had driven thither; but the proportion of such, though large, was not nearly *so* large as some might imagine. The circumstances in which they had been born and bred, without any fault of their own, had plainly disqualified the largest proportion from making any efficient fight for life—they were mental and physical weaklings. Their moral perceptions, of course, were not very strong either; but still they seemed to have a sincerely honest wish for

work—work that fled them like a tantalizing phantom ; sometimes letting itself be apparently clasped, and then vanishing into thin air. The *look* of the fathers and mothers of this class, and even more pathetically, the look of their poor little bandy-legged, strumously-scarred and swollen, goggle-eyed babies, told a plain story of the conditions of their lives. It was not necessary to consult the doctor's report to learn that they had far more than the average share of the ills to which all flesh is heir. The doctor's 'Rheumatism' *they* would have called 'roomatics ;' they might not have understood what his 'Catarrh,' 'Incipient Fever,' &c., meant in words ; but they were terribly familiar with the whole long list in fact. 'Excessive debility from starvation' stood out prominently in the doctor's book, but it was writ far larger on their pinched faces and in the crooked-knee totterings of their lath-like legs. 'Dyspepsy,' I may add, in passing, was one of the few diseases *not* to be found in the Refuge doctor's list. It is a horrible disorder, but from that the poorest of the poor would seem to be exempt. Exercise, change of scene, and simple diet are, I believe, some of the chief items in the regimen prescribed for dyspeptic patients by the faculty. As a rider, I would venture to add, let them exercise themselves, change their scene, and simplify their diet by going to see those startling phenomena, their non-dyspeptic countrymen, and relieving their necessities out of their own superfluities. They might thus not only escape from the overbrooding hypochondria that darkens their lives, upon the sunniest day, with the shadow of its fiend-like wings, but also secure

one of the purest of positive pleasures. To visit the sick, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, are A B C duties of Christianity, but they meet with a marvellously rich reward. As if the pleasure which the doing of the deeds gives—supplemented as it is, in very many cases (*maugre* all the talk about the ungrateful mercenariness of the poor), by the lasting earthly love they win for the doer—as if all this were not enough, our Lord has said, ‘Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these little ones, ye have done it unto me.’ The Founder of our religion proudly claimed the common humanity which linked Him with ‘the least.’ How fond we poor little creatures are of fancying ourselves, through merits of our own, of an entirely different species, if not genus, from our fellow-men !

In the Refuge, moreover, there was a large sprinkling of ‘decent folk’—honest, industrious, skilful working people, who had done well at their trades, until thrown out of work by a sudden cessation of demand for their workmanship. A few of these had grown reckless, and were some of the untidiest and least attentive of my congregation ; but most were just the opposite. The husband—no longer, poor fellow, the proud *house-band*—the wife, the children, were all freshened up in their poor little way, and knelt and rose and sat in decorous regularity and rest. Poor things, they looked, even in a Refuge, a little proud to be able to prove their by-gone ‘social superiority’ to the British heathen around them, by showing their familiarity with the Prayer-book ; but it must have been sad for them to think of the past Sundays in

which they had turned out together for service in their Sunday best.

The voice of the Litany, in one language or another, is heard in many lands ; but scarcely anywhere can its comprehensive supplications for God's succour, help, and comfort to all that are in danger, necessity, and tribulation—all that are desolate and oppressed—have had a more emphatic point than they had in the Refuge that morning. Even those who had previously been only parroting, the experienced repeaters of the responses, when we came to those wide-hearted prayers, joined in the 'We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord,' with a meaning in their tone which showed that they felt they were praying for themselves. The parrot tone was plainly perceptible again when I had read, 'That it may please thee to give and preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth, so as in due time we may enjoy them.' Irrational, radically blasphemous, as it was, I could not help feeling that the prayer *there* almost sounded like a taunt.

It was the fourth Sunday in Advent. In reference to both worlds, the refugees, in the words of the Collect for the day, were sore let and hindered in running the race set before them. Inexperienced as I was, I was sorely puzzled as to what I was to say that would give them any comfort, or do them any good. When the prayers were over, I fumbled in the Bible and Prayer-book, and at last read out, almost at desperate random, as my text, the latter part of the Epistle for the day :—'Be careful for nothing : but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And

the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.'

My first extempore sermon was a miserable failure, so far as elocution went; and yet in effect it was not quite a failure. I managed to make some of my hearers believe—in spite of my stammerings, and sentences that ended abruptly as turned-up rails—that *I* believed in my text, and that they might believe in it too. Again and again I read the text, rolling its easy flow of words and direct meaning, like a sweet morsel, in my mouth. 'Why not keep on reading it over and over again, until they have got it by heart, and then give the glory and the benediction? what good will your limping "interpretation" of it do?' I often thought; but still, having stood up to preach a sermon without book, I felt compelled to spin out my five-and-twenty minutes in an extempore sermon of some kind. I repeat that it was the sorriest sermon, but still I tried hard to make my hearers understand that it was possible even for them to be careful for nothing, if they sought by prayer with thanksgiving, through Christ Jesus, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding. And my stuttering efforts, as I have said before, were not entirely vain. There were not many of my hearers who seemed to have any notion of what I had been driving at; but now and then I had seen a nod of satisfaction instead of somnolence, and heard a sigh of incipient resignation—of relief from what had long been a state of chronic hopelessness; and when I was going out at the Refuge door, a carpenter, with a rule-less rule-pocket in his trousers, came up to me and said, 'I felt lost, sir, when I had to get rid of this'—clapping the

empty rule-pocket—‘but now I don’t feel. all at sea. Perhaps I may get all my tools back—perhaps I mayn’t; but anyhow you’ve made me feel that there’s a God that squares everything, after all. *He* hasn’t lost his rule. No, sir,’ the man added, in an offended tone, when (I fear, quite as much out of vanity, that had not expected to be gratified, as out of benevolence) I had inquired whether there was any one I could speak to about him—‘No, sir; I didn’t come to beg, and I didn’t think you would have thought so. I came to thank you, because you had relieved my feelings. You spoke as if you meant it just now, and I trusted to you to understand me. Of course I should be glad to get work—God knows how glad I should be—but I didn’t come carneying to you to get it. I’m not a say-after-me, sir. I can see you’re young at preaching, sir—I’ve heard real preachers, that can run it out like oil—but if you’ll only try to speak from your heart, as you did just now, you needn’t mind so much that you haven’t got the gift of the gab. People who want a bit of comfort will overlook your failings.’

Before the carpenter came up to me I had had a talk with the matron’s young countywoman, and also a talk with the Cambridge man. In a moral point of view—in a logical point of view—it is hard to say why we should lavish so much pity on those who have thrown away good chances, and complacently remark of those to whose level the fortunate ones have brought themselves—in the handicap race of life in which, at starting, they were so much favoured—‘Oh! that is only what they were born to.’ But still the feeling is widely-spread, even amongst the

most heavily-handicapped. A 'reduced gentleman'—however guilty he may be of having reduced himself to a lower denomination—finds no more outspoken pitiers than amongst those who have struggled with poverty from their cradles (if they *had* any), and are likely to struggle with it to their graves. This Cambridge man, probably, was the least worthy inmate of the Refuge. Friends, fortune, intellect, a very creditable university career—he had sacrificed all, because, without any appreciable temptation, beyond a suddenly-acquired liking for it, he had taken to drink. And yet his co-inmates, who had any knowledge of his history, treated him with a compassion which had no contempt in it—they even 'respected' him, because his accent and little tricks of manner showed, in spite of the blackguardism in word and deed in which he could indulge, that he had once been a 'gentleman.' The 'feudal system' may have been cut down, but its roots are not yet grubbed-up, in England. The Cambridge man was far more complimentary than the carpenter. He plastered me with flattery that would have been impudently fulsome, had it not been plain that the unhappy man had been brought by drink and want into an almost fatuous condition. He cried copiously—solemnly assured me that he had made up his mind to reform—and then asked me for the loan of a sovereign, to get a box of clothes out of pawn. If he could dress himself decently, he said, he could recover a tutorship at Upper Norwood from which he had absented himself for a week or so. Sovereigns then, as now, were scarce with me—sense (I am afraid) was scarce also—but I could not refuse the

sovereign. I thought it might be just the stone that would block his downward rush upon the road to ruin. I promised him that he should have it, if he would call at my lodgings next morning. The issue of that unhappy promise I shall have to relate afterwards.

The girl I have spoken of returned to the women's ward as soon as service was over, and when the matron and I went up, we found her sitting at the end of her bunk, just as she had been sitting the night before. She was in an obstinately sullen mood. The matron tried to get her to talk about their common county. 'I'm sure you come from Buckinghamshire, my girl,' said the good woman. 'What part is it? Anywhere near Aylesbury way?—perhaps I might know your friends.' 'Friends!' echoed the girl; but in a tone of dreary scorn, that had a terribly lonely sound. 'We all have a Friend,' I answered to the 'I've got no friends' that tone conveyed—'a Friend who sticketh closer than a brother, if we will but accept his love. Father and mother, every human being we cared for on earth, may forsake us, and yet we need not feel lonely if we can feel that Jesus Christ is our friend.' She shook her head impatiently, as a horse shakes its to get rid of flies—she was plainly weary of all such preaching. 'I never *did* anything to be brought to this,' she cried, half fiercely, 'and yet I'm brought to it—what's the good of talking?' After this she continued so obstinately silent that the matron's patience gave way. 'You're an ungrateful girl,' she said. 'The parson and me mean you well. You're Buckinghamshire bred, I know, and so you ought to have more respect for the clergy—let alone me, that

would do you a good turn if I could see my way clear to it. But if you won't speak, who's to know what to do? You haven't such a lot to help you, I should say, as you can afford to snub them that would.'

The matron would have spared that taunt if she could have foreseen the forlorn look that followed it. That look instantly softened the good woman; but the girl called back the tears that had gushed for a moment into her lonely eyes, and became more stonily silent than before.

'I can't make her out, poor young thing,' said the matron, as we went down-stairs. 'A pretty creature she must have been, and might be again, if her face was filled out a bit. The Buckinghamshire women have a name for their good looks—anyhow, that's what people used to say in my time. It's a pity she's so shut-up, and thinks so much about her rights. If you come to rights, bad's the best with the best of us, ain't it, sir? And it ain't possible for such as us to stand alone, as if we didn't want a bit of help now and then from one another. We're *always* wanting it, proud as we may be. It's like the way the children prop up the cards—knock away one, and down they all come. *Rights*, poor young thing! Those who think so much about their rights are apt to do wrongs to get their rights—rights as they *fancy* 'em. I do believe she'd rather starve *now* than go astray—she's got pride in her. But that can't last for ever, if she *don't* starve meanwhile. I wish she'd open her mind to me. She's Buckinghamshire-born-and-bred, I know, and I meant her well, and did my best to show it.'

VIII.

THE TWIN CROSSING-SWEEPERS.



CROSSING-SWEEPING in the poor parts of the East End of London is not a very valuable property on week-days. Most of the people who cross the road care little how muddy it is. There are no eccentric old gentlemen in the neighbourhood who pay five-shilling and even golden toll (as used, at any rate, I have heard, to be the case in the West End) when they condescend to pick their way over the crossing; no benevolent old ladies, whose combined pensions give the crossing-sweeper a very comfortable little income; no lazy, swellish servants, to hire him with coppers and cold fowl to post letters and call cabs, in order that their own brawny calves may still enjoy a spotless *otium cum dignitate*. Crossing-sweepers, locally practising their profession, are scarce in the parts I speak of on week-days. But on Sundays they make their appearance in front of the churches and the larger chapels

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just before and after service. The Sunday incumbents of the two crossings that led to one of my churches, were at one time a little boy and a little girl : strikingly alike in features, although the boy looked very feeble, and the girl, in spite of her poor clothing and diet, seemed a merrily healthy young puss. Some of those who had coppers to spare chose the boy's crossing when they came to church, because he looked so weak ; but most gave their pence and halfpence to the girl, because she smiled so brightly and brandished her broom with so much cheerful vigour. Both the children were very well-behaved, and, poor as their dress was, they managed somehow to make it look tidy. They were not exactly 'pretty children,' but still their faces were very different from the jumble of flat features, lighted only by low cunning, which is the general type of countenance amongst our poor little 'street Arabs.' They differed from the ruck of street children strikingly in another respect. As soon as the single bell had ceased to toll, they left their brooms in a corner of one of the porches, and stole into church, dropping side by side into one of the obscurest free seats. (What a pity it is, by-the-by, that so many of our churches in poor neighbourhoods have only single bells, which clank as monotonously as the factory bells which the dwellers in such places hear every week-day, instead of at once soothing and cheering them as a Sunday peal of bells soothes and cheers when it rings out like a chorus of angel voices !)

Sunday after Sunday, when I passed the little crossing-sweepers on my way to church, I determined to make inquiries about them, but it so happened that for some

weeks they escaped my memory as soon as Sunday had passed. One Sunday morning I missed them from their accustomed post. A bent old man, almost muffled from view in a threadbare, greasy, many-caped drab great-coat, was plying the broom in their stead. I asked him if he could tell me what had become of the children.

‘Boy’s bad, an’ the gal’s a-nussin’ of him.’

‘Where do they live?’

‘Them an’ me lodges together in a harch, an’ the gal says to me, “Fred can’t go, Ginger, an’ I’m agoin’ to stay along with him to-day—so you take my broom, an’ go down to our pitch afore the new church—it’s a pity some un shouldn’t git the browns.” So I’ve come, but bless ye, sir, I don’t mean to keep all I gits. They shall have their whack, as they’ve a right. You’ll please to remember the sweeper, sir?’

I asked him if he would pilot me after service to the singular joint lodging of which he had spoken. ‘Ye’re not agoin’ to blow on us, sir?’ he cross-questioned, glancing up sharply. ‘Ye see, we’ve got it rent free, an’ though it ain’t used for nothin’ else, them as the place belongs to might turn us out if they knowed there was any one in it.’

There is a network of railways in the East End now, but at that time the Blackwall—the trains drawn by a rope that ran over wheels—was the only East-End line. In the upper portion of one of its arches, that had been boarded up for use as a stable and hayloft, but had not been long tenanted in that capacity, the old man and the children resided.

‘I hain’t been there so long as them,’ said the old man,

as we walked back together. 'I'm a finder by trade, if ye can call it a trade—pick up rags, an' bones, an' metal, and sich; an' one night I come back dead beat, for I 'adn't had nothin' to eat, an' 'adn't found nothin' to speak on neither. I sot down by that there railway harch, an' felt as if I could blubber, hold as I be. It was a good step yet to the place where I was a-lodgin' then, an' there wasn't anythin' for me to eat when I did git back. Well, jist then up come them two children, wi' their brooms over their shoulders. They work a City crossin' a-week days, an' only come to yourn a-Sundays, 'cos it's handy like, an' the City's empty a-Sundays. "What's the matter, old man?" says the little gal. "I'm tired," says I. "Come in an' 'ave a rest," says she. "That'll be better than settin' out 'ere in the rain." The rain *was* comin' down; but I was so tired, I should like to ha' gone to sleep there. So up they took me to the loft where we're all a-lodgin' now; an' when they found out I was 'ungry, they give me some o' their grub. "If you've no objections, I'll turn in 'ere to-night," says I; an' I did. Both on 'em said their prayers, afore *they* turned in. It made me feel ashamed like—I was layin' awake watchin' on 'em. "That's good children," says I. "I'd ha' done it myself, if I 'adn't been so tired; but now I'll say 'em in bed." An' I did say 'em, sir, an' I've gone on saying 'em, an' so has the children. Presently says I, "Would you mind if I was to come an' doss 'ere?" They says "No," an' I says "Good-night, then," an' *they* says "Good-night," and we've lodged together ever since. Sometimes I helps them, an' sometimes they helps me, accordin' as we've got on. Poor dears, they wouldn't be

crossin'-sweepin', if they'd their rights. Their father was a doctor, sir ! Don't it sound strange ? They don't speak agin' him more than they can 'elp ; but I can make out that their father was a bad sort, though he *were* a doctor. He'd 'ave let 'em run wild, if it 'adn't 'a' been for the mother, an' she died afore the father, an' when *he* died, there was nobody to take care on 'em. As I can make out, they was left alone in the house after his buryin' without anythin' to eat, an' got skeared, an' come out to see what they could do for theirselves. I s'pose it was thought as they'd friends to look after 'em by them as seed to the buryin'—I can make out there was no friends at the buryin', an' I guess the doctor chap had tired out his friends, axin' 'em for money an' sich like. I know a son o' mine tired out me, or I shouldn't ha' been where I am now, an' I don't expect that doctors an' sich is much different from sich as us when the devil gits a 'old on 'em. Any'ow, them two poor children turned out into the streets—it must be pretty nigh two year ago—they've been where they are goin' on for a year and more—an' in the streets they've got their livin' ever since. The mother must ha' been a good un, whatever the father were. It's wonderful the little wickedness they know, but then, ye see, they keeps theirselves *to* theirselves—that's why they come to the harch—an' God knows I wouldn't lead 'em wrong. It seems 'ard, though, that nothin' can be done for 'em—that it do. Both on 'em can read very pretty. Whenever I see a scrap o' print, I pick it up to keep 'em in practice. Their way o' talk is pretty, too. In course they've picked up some o' the words they've heard, but they don't say

'em so sarcy as the other children. I don't mind *their* callin' on me Ginger, though who it was fust give me that name, or what reason they 'ad, I can't make out. There ain't much o' ginger about me, as I see. But, law bless ye, sir, I don't mind it from *them*; an' I calls them Fred an' Em'ly, an' we gits on as if we'd knowed one another all our lives.'

'That's *our* harch, sir,' the old man said presently, pointing to one that was secluded, although with houses almost touching it. There was no thoroughfare past it, and no near window gave upon it. The old man opened a door cut out in the stable-gates, and motioned me to enter. In the four corners of one of the stalls lay four little heaps—of dark rags, of comparatively light rags, of bones, and of old metal (the last subdivided into rusty iron and more precious metallic waifs). 'I does my sortin' down 'ere,' Ginger explained. 'I ought to ha' got rid o' *them* by rights yesterday—there ain't so much on 'em—but I was too tired to stir out when I got back, an' I never does business a-Sundays. I don't call *this* business'—pointing to the broom—'what I've took at the church is for the children. Manners is manners,' he added apologetically, as he pushed before me, when I was about to mount the ladder that led to the loft; 'but they might be skeared if they see you fust.' When he had reached the top of the ladder, I heard a jingling splash of coppers. 'There, I hain't done so bad,' cried Ginger; 'an' what d'ye think? 'ere's your parson come to see you. Come up, sir. Mind how ye come, though. Stretch your foot over them two rungs—they're rotten.'

A little mouldy hay and straw had been left in the loft by the former tenant, and two or three tattered sacks. It is no exaggeration to say that these were its chief furniture. The articles which the incoming tenants had brought in with them, or subsequently acquired, might all have been put into a not very large carpet-bag. On a hay-and-straw-and-sacking bed lay Fred, with Emily squatted on the floor beside him—arrested by my coming, in the gleeful counting of the vicariously earned coppers which she had commenced. Both the children were rather shy at first, but they soon—Emily especially—got at home with me. What they told me, in reply to my questions, tallied with what I had heard from the old man. They both, however, gave old Ginger more credit than he had given to himself; and though they had plainly no awe of the old fellow, and Emily made open fun of him before me, they seemed to look upon him as a kind of protection. It was touching to see how fond the children were of each other. Emily wanted to make out that Fred did all their work, and Fred, rousing himself from his sickly languor, startled me by shouting, ‘That’s a lie. Em’s worth two of me.’ I had a Testament, and tested Emily’s reading powers with it. ‘Oh, that *is* nice! I remember all about that,’ she cried, when she had finished, very creditably, the dozen verses I had pointed out. ‘Ginger’s very kind—he always brings us home something to read when he can. There was half a *Lloyd’s* he brought home last night, and there’s a pretty bit in it about a little girl and a canary and a scarlet geranium; and the canary dies, you know, and the little girl buries him under the

scarlet geranium, because he liked to perch on it. Ma used to have a canary, don't you remember, Fred? I read some of that to Fred, but he thought it wasn't Sunday reading, so I picked out this, because it sounded like a sermon; but he didn't like it, and I didn't like it. Perhaps we could have made it out better if there had been a head and a tail to it.' She handed me a crumpled, charred tract, which had evidently been twisted up for a pipe-light. Great was Emily's delight when I told her she might keep the Testament. 'We can go over them all now, can't we, Fred?' she exultingly exclaimed. 'The little children, and the good Samaritan and his donkey, and everything. We used to read them to mamma of a Sunday evening, when papa was out,' she added in explanation.

Whilst we were talking a train rumbled overhead. The reverberations which it caused were new to me; I could not help giving a little start, and Emily could not help giving a little laugh. 'You behave yourself, Em'ly,' growled Ginger, who felt that he had somehow dropped out of the leading position due to his age. 'It's a queer sound to them as ain't used to it, an' to them as is. You young uns are snorin' like anything when they goes over at nights, but sometimes I'm a-layin' awake, an' sometimes they wakes me, an' any'ow it ain't pleasant to 'ave that rumble-tumble right over ye—as if the Last Day 'ad come, an' the skies was a-droppin'-in. If a train was to come down on ye, ye'd larf on the other side o' yer mouth, Em'ly.'

The children, when asked whether they would not like to make their living in some other way than by crossing-

sweeping—some way more congruous with the opportunities which their father seemed to have thrown away for them—were not half so anxious as Ginger was they should be, to avail themselves of the chance of ‘bettering themselves’ which my words held out. ‘We don’t do bad,’ said Emily, ‘when Fred’s up, and he’ll soon be up again, and we shouldn’t like to be parted, and we’re used to Ginger. He isn’t such a bad old chap, though he does growl sometimes as if he’d snap your head off.’ ‘I don’t want to get rid on ye,’ retorted Ginger, ‘but if ye won’t give up crossin’ sweepin’, when ye’ve got the hoffer, ye’re sillier than I thought ye was, Em’ly.’

There was food in the loft, I saw, and money to buy more—such as it was. Fred, moreover, did not seem to be what is called ‘dangerously ill.’ But those two children getting in love with the hard street life and railway-arch shelter they shared with the old man, who was so fond of them in his grumpy way, clung to my memory long after the little door in the stable-gates had been closed behind me. It might be impossible to help the old man—however much one might wish to give him a helping hand—but surely something might be done for his young fellow-lodgers.

The next day I went to the arch with the clergyman to whom I was giving temporary partial assistance. He remembered the name of the children’s father. The ‘doctor’ I found had been one of those medical men, numerous in poor neighbourhoods, who also keep druggists’ shops. My friend also remembered and respected the character of the doctor’s wife, and was startled to find that her children

had for months been crossing-sweepers in front of his own church. When we mounted the ladder Emily as well as Fred was in the loft. She had raced in from her City crossing to see how he was getting on, and was giving him a drink of water: looking very scared because he talked so strangely, and stared at her as if he did not know her. The violent cold which he had taken had ended in fever, and the first thing to be done was to get him into the Fever Hospital. I cannot remember now whether it was the old building or the present one in the Liverpool Road, but I do remember that Ginger used to find time once or twice a week to trudge northwards and sit with his young friend. Whilst her brother was in the hospital my friend took Emily into his own house. He had children of his own, and was, therefore, naturally unwilling that she should visit Fred; but she fretted so that, fearing she would otherwise break away, my friend went with her to the hospital long before he thought it was prudent for her to visit it. No harm came of the visit, but it was not until months had passed that he ventured to tell his wife of it.

Admission into the Orphan Asylum at Clapton was eventually obtained for both the children. The night before they started for their school my friend invited Ginger to take tea with them at the parsonage. Its pill-box parlour was no gilded saloon, but Ginger looked so aghast at the idea of sitting down on a carpet and in company with two parsons and a parson's wife, that the latter object of his dread considerably proposed that he and his young friends should have their tea alone together in her husband's uncarpeted study. The books it held were not many, but

they impressed Ginger with awe. 'Ah,' he half-sighed, 'you won't want me to pick up bits o' print now, *Miss Em'ly* an' *Master Fred*.' When they were bidding their old friend good-bye the children said he must often come and see them at the Asylum. '*No*,' answered Ginger. 'They wouldn't let me if I wanted, an' I shouldn't want if they would. You've got your rights, thank God, an' are a-goin' to be brought up respectable, an' I ain't a respectable sort. I shall miss ye both—we got on uncommon well when we was much of a muchness—but, law bless ye, ye'll soon be ashamed to think ye ever lived with sich as me. I s'pose there ain't no lor, though, agin' my takin' your crossin' of a Sunday if I can git it, an' the gen'lemen 'ere 'ave no objections. I shall be lonesome of a Sunday now with nothin' to do, an' I can go to church all the same, an' it'll seem, some'ow, as if ye 'adn't quite gone up in a balloon like.'

IX.

A SCHOLAR AND A GENTLEMAN.



HALF an hour before the time appointed on Monday morning the Cambridge man I had met at the Refuge called at my lodgings. He was in a very restless condition. His watery eye ceaselessly wandered, as if seeking a hole in which it could hide itself from questioning glances. His trembling hands never stopped twitching and twirling something; his left thumb scratched at the only button left upon his coat, as if it had been a dry splash of mud that he wanted to scrape off. He was plainly in a great hurry to get the sovereign he had been promised, and then to take his departure immediately. But I wanted to have some talk with him, and therefore persuaded him to stay to breakfast with me. The bit of bread that he had had that morning at the Refuge seemed, however, to have quite satisfied his appetite for food. He merely took a sip of coffee, and then glanced about with the furtive fretfulness

which a man who has sold himself, body and soul, to drink so often shows when he is longing for a spirituous stimulant, and yet does not like to ask for it. His manner made me feel doubtful about him even then, although I still believed that he sincerely desired to reform.

I got him at last to tell me a little of his history, and it was strange to note how much self-conceit there was still left in the miserable man. He bragged about his university career, and almost openly sneered at me when he found that I had taken my degree without even Junior Optime honours. I learnt then that he was in orders. 'I've been a London clergyman, too,' he said half-boastfully; 'but mine was a very different kind of life from what yours must be, I fancy. Don't you find it a bore to have nobody but common people to mix with? But then, of course, if you've been used to that sort of thing, it's different. I don't suppose I ever had a poor person inside my place—why, the pew-openers made little fortunes. It was a proprietary shop in the West-End, and nice profits the proprietors must have netted until they were fools enough to quarrel with me. There was no peddling parish-work there—blankets and coals, and bed-ridden old paupers, and all that kind of rubbish. Cream of the cream, sir—that's what *I* had for my congregation.'

According to his own account, *he* was not to blame for his degradation. Circumstances had combined to pull him down. The chapel-speculators—'rank snobs, every one of them, though they *had* the sense to hire a gentleman to "catch the swells," as they called it'—had un-

warrantably interfered with his personal liberty, although he was at the highest tide of his aristocratic popularity, and he had thrown over the chapel in indignant disgust. And then the girl to whom he had been engaged, and of whom he had been, and was still, devotedly fond, had been driven by her friends to put an end to the engagement without a shadow of a shade of reasonable excuse, and he had been tempted now and then to try to raise his spirits from their deep depression first by a little extra wine, and next by an occasional glass of raw brandy, and the habit had insensibly grown upon him, &c., &c. I learnt afterwards that the chapel authorities had not interfered with his 'personal liberty' until it had run to seed in license which seriously menaced his popularity, and consequently their profits; and that the extra wine, &c., had been the cause instead of the consequence of the rupture of the other engagement. After he lost his chapel, St John, as I will call him, had lived for a time on his friends, and when they grew weary of him, he had taken to private pupils. A man of his abilities and attainments might have done well in that line of life, if he could have kept his head cool, and been industrious enough to rub off the rust which was beginning to gather on his classical and mathematical lore; but the life, both morally and mentally, was too exacting for such a man as St John had become. He next turned 'hack-parson;' drinking the proceeds of the occasional services and sermons for which he plied almost as soon as he had pocketed them. Sometimes he had begun to drink before he mounted the reading-desk or pulpit, and the demand for his services fell

off—even in city churches in which six hearers were considered an overflowing congregation. He somehow got appointed chaplain to one of the obscurer cemeteries, but he did not hold the appointment long. *His* version of his dismissal was, that the wet yellow clods piled up round the gaping, roughly-boarded graves, the wet yellow leaves that dropped into them from the dank, dark, overbrooding branches, in the autumn in which he obtained and forfeited his appointment; the ever-tolling chapel-bell, the black groups of sobbing people, the black groups of almost grinning ‘mourners,’ and the utter callousness of all the other cemetery-officials, so weighed upon his already nearly broken spirits that he could not always command his voice when he was consigning ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life. Unless that hope *be* sure and certain in the heart of him who utters it, or unless he has hardened himself into looking upon the shovelling in of earth upon the end of a life of hopes and fears (that reached beyond the grave) as carelessly as he might watch the shutting of an empty drawer, I can imagine that a cemetery-chaplain’s must be one of the dreariest of lives. But gin is no balm of Gilead for a bruised and wounded heart, and, according to the official account of poor St John’s dismissal, he lost his appointment because he was so fond of gin that, before a funeral train could file out of the cemetery gateway—even at the jolting trot which so jars upon the sincere mourners who were drawn into the cemetery at a snail’s pace—the chaplain might be seen slipping in at the side-door of a beetle-browed

low public-house, peeping round a corner on the opposite side of the road.

St John, seventh (bracketed) wrangler of his year, had next to stoop to usherships in third-rate classical and commercial academies for young gentlemen. For a time he was a favourite customer with one of the clerical and scholastic agents who, in those days, colonized the Adelphi purlieus of the Strand. *He* had not to stand long in the crowded little outer room, furnished with frayed faded oil-cloth, a tall blistered slate-coloured desk, a lame flabby-cushioned, lanky stool, a set of rusty fire-irons, and a yellow fly-spitten engraving of Louis XVI. mounting the scaffold in his shirt sleeves. The raw boys, and middle-aged failures in other lines, who were waiting to secure their first scholastic engagements; the experienced ushers, who horrified the others, and thought themselves 'fast,' because they spoke slightly of 'governors'—i. e. the men they wanted to hire them without any intention that they *should* govern them; and with the contempt which familiarity had bred of 'Old Nick,' the agent—clashing the rusty fire-irons, in the broadsword exercise, beneath his very nose: all of these queer would-be instructors of English middle-class youth made way for St John to get up to the parlour door when he entered the stifling little outer office. His seventh wranglership had mounted to a senior wranglership in their mythology. As soon as he was aware of St John's presence, 'Old Nick' would glide in with a cat-like step, and, grinning like a big-headed, purring, old tabby tom cat (I am quoting St John in my description of the

agency), would beckon to him to enter the more luxuriously furnished chamber set apart for the 'principals,' who paid the agent nothing. There, at first, St John was eagerly snapped up by underbred, half-educated, or totally-uneducated men, who jumped at the chance of getting a distinguished university man—in orders, too—cheap for their 'establishments.' The examiner, whom 'Old Nick' kept to make a pretence of examining other aspirants in *Cæsar*, *Greek Testament*, the *Anabasis*, and *Simple Equations*, never dreamt, of course, of tasting and testing St John's quality. The schoolmasters talked bumpuously about the 'first desk' of which he was to be the incumbent, and of the 'clerical duty' which their influence would procure for him in their parishes; but still they seemed half afraid of the phoenix they had caught. But the phoenix soon moulted, without getting brighter feathers, in the schoolmasters' opinion. He made himself such an insufferable nuisance that time after time he came back upon 'Old Nick's' hands. At first the agent had no objection—there was another five-shillings registration-fee to pocket, and another five-percentage on the next year's salary, a quarter's advance of which (although it was never earned) St John and the agent always stipulated for. But St John came back *too* often: and the agent, for the sake of his 'connection,' was obliged to give him the cold shoulder. He tried other agents, and ran a still shorter course with them.

. After that he went utterly 'to the dogs.' For months he had been 'living anyhow.' The story he had told me about the Upper Norwood tutorship—in spite of the pre-

cise name, address, and directions which way I was to turn, if I wished to verify his statements, that he gave me—proved to be a tissue of plausibly barefaced falsehoods. He confessed that he had tried to earn 2s. 6d. a day at the docks, and was very indignant at the thought that he had not been able to earn it, after stooping to seek for it; but he made out that such extremity was merely an exceptional, instead of being, as I found afterwards, a normal result of his ‘weakness.’ However he might disguise it, it was a very sad story that St John told me. There was a maudlin pathos, a maudlin humour, a maudlin cynicism in it, that were almost equally distressing to listen to. When he spoke of his lost love, he wept a drunkard’s maudlin tears, and cursed her with a drunkard’s maudlin oaths. ‘She might have done anything with me, but she chose to marry some one else,’ he said, as if he thought that she had done herself as well as him a great injury in refusing to link their lots in life—and then he swore, and then he cried, and then he glanced slyly at me, to see whether he was impressing me, or ‘committing himself’ in my opinion. It was a doleful exhibition of unstrung character, but I still clung to the belief that he wished to make another effort to struggle out of the slough in which he had defiled himself, and might succeed if he obtained a helping hand. So meanly mixed are our motives, that I am afraid I derived a little ignoble pride from the thought that, after all, a high wrangler had been forced to appeal for assistance to undistinguished me. He pulled out a greasy, dirty, crumpled *fasciculus* of pawn-tickets to convince me of the truth of

his story about the box whose detention prevented him from resuming his Upper Norwood tutorship, and then, when he saw that he had been believed without the duplicates' testimony, whined for 'another sov.' to take him down 'and so on,' when he had recovered his box. He offered to leave with me the whole bundle of his pawn-tickets as security for the double loan. 'The things would cover it a hundred times over, if you took them out of pledge,' he boasted—immediately adding, when he noticed that the proffer had brought, for the first time, his pecuniary honour into doubt, 'That's only my joke, you know.' 'You shall have it again in a week's time, with many thanks,' he said, as he slipped the money into a waistcoat-pocket, the lining of which dropped it out upon the floor. 'All right,' laughed St John, as he stooped to pick up the rolling coin. 'I'll come in more presentable togs next time. I'm sure I'm very much obliged. I'll often call, and we'll have a chat together about the old place—Cambridge, I mean—I think we shall get on together, old fellow,' he added, patronizingly, as he left the house.

A few days afterwards he called again, as wretchedly dressed as before, and once more full of alternating penitence and pride. He had only taken one glass, he said, on his road to the pawnbroker's, but it had upset him, and whilst he was unconscious his pocket had been picked. Did I doubt his word? No gentleman disputed another gentleman's honour simply because he was unfortunate. He was bitterly sorry that he had yielded to the temptation, but he had felt faint for want of a stimulant, and

could solemnly assure me that he had only taken one glass. Would I lend him one more sovereign just to get his box out of pawn? He could manage then, he thought, without troubling me further, and would ask for an advance the instant he got to Upper Norwood—his word was not doubted there—they would only be too glad to get him back—some people appreciated him still—and remit by P.O. order.

It was plain enough how the money had gone. The wretched man was just on the verge of *delirium tremens*. Of course I did not lend the third sovereign, but as I had heard that for a man in such a state total deprivation of drink was as dangerous as unlimited indulgence in it, I got him a little weak brandy and water. He tossed it off, and grew a little calmer. I persuaded him to sit down, and tried hard to discover some way of being useful to him. At last I remembered a friend whose charity was large enough to give even such an unpromising applicant employment, and went into my bedroom to get my desk to write to this friend. When I returned, St John was stealing back from the chiffoniere with the brandy-bottle in his hand. Before I could get to him he had filled his tumbler with unwatered cognac, and before I could dash the glass out of his grasp, he had swallowed more than three parts of its fiery contents. He abused me for my stinginess when I locked up the brandy-bottle, and almost immediately afterwards rushed away, declaring that I had deceived him, and that he deeply regretted that he had stooped to make such a fellow the recipient of his confidences. Twice again he called; the first time looking more like a walking corpse

than a living man, and the second time so ferociously intoxicated that I was compelled to call in the police. It was a dismal sight to see that wreck of good looks, good chances, who had once been the darling of a lovely, good girl's heart, borne away to the station-house strapped down upon a stretcher—it was horrible to hear the fiendish imprecations which his foaming mouth howled out.

When he was released from confinement I made one more effort to save him ; but it proved utterly useless. He was joined to his bestial idols, and I was forced to let him alone. Drink, obtained anyhow, was the only thing on earth he seemed to care for. 'Don't talk shop to me,' he answered fiercely, when I reminded him of the judgment to come. 'I'm up to the tricks of the trade ; and I made a precious sight better thing of it than you ever will, old fellow !'

About a year after my last interview with him, my eye fell on the following paragraph in a newspaper :—

'FOUND DEAD.—A miserable object, well known to the police, was yesterday found dead in one of the new houses that are being built near Hackney Wick. A workman, on mounting the scaffolding in the morning, found the corpse lying half in, half outside, an unfinished window. The board that had been fastened to the ladder to prevent boys from climbing up it had been removed, no doubt by the deceased. The previous night, as our readers will remember, was one of the severest of the season, and the luckless outcast had succumbed to the inclemency of the weather. His clothing was of the most deplorable de-

scription, and the body in a frightful state of filth and emaciation. Incredible as it may sound, it is said that the deceased was well-connected, and at one time the idol of the aristocratic congregation of a West-End Proprietary Chapel, of which he was the incumbent. A yellow old letter, in a lady's hand, but almost illegible from dirt and tattered creases, was found in the breast pocket of what it sounds like satire to call the deceased's coat, containing a lock of hair, tied with what seems to have been once blue ribbon, and addressed to the Rev. F. St John, B.A., at some number in South Audley Street, so far as we could decipher the direction. "*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*" is a maxim that we would gladly follow; but in the interests of truth, and to hold up a warning to others who may be tempted to throw away similar opportunities, it is our painful duty to add that the Rev. F. St John, B.A., had been committed as "drunk and incapable" and "drunk and disorderly" no less than 187 times. The body was removed to the Hackney Dead-house, and the inquest is to take place to-day. It is not probable that any of his former associates will be anxious to identify the corpse of the unhappy man. "*Sic transit gloria mundi.*"

That was poor St John's end, and the penny-a-liner had made the most of it, and read over his account again, no doubt, with great complacency when he had made the round of the offices that had accepted his 'flimsy,' and was dining off the proceeds in a Shoe Lane tavern.

But if, seated amongst her children, opposite her husband, the giver of that lock of hair, the writer of that letter

—kept back when the doleful return of correspondence on both sides took place, and kept to the last—if she, I say, happened to read that melancholy ‘In Memoriam,’ perchance even poor St John found one genuine mourner, however heartily she might love her husband and her children, and thank God for her escape.

The pharisaical feeling of thankfulness that I had never been tempted to sin like that ‘luckless outcast,’ to borrow the penny-a-liner’s contemptuously compassionate phrase, which arose within me when I read the miserable news, received a sudden check. ‘Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall’ tolled in my heart like a wind-stirred bell.

X.

A BIRD-CATCHER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY.



MR JONES was as temperate as poor St John was prone to drink. Although the proprietor still showed crustiness at times, I liked to look in at the bird-shop every now and then. There was an honest crispness in Mr Jones's talk that acted on me like a wholesome tonic. 'Much good his fine friends an' learnin' did him, after all,' said Mr Jones one day, when we had been talking of St John's death. 'But he's dead, poor beggar, and only a cowardly sneak would fling mud at a dead man. You may depend upon it that gal's hair he'd got was to blame—but he should have been a man and got over it. That's what I had to do.'

There was something very piquant in the idea of Mr Jones's having had a 'love affair,' and I wiled him into an autobiography. 'It's the gal, I know, you want to hear about,' he said with a knowing wink. 'But I ain't a-goin'

to say how I was a fool, without showin' how I come to be one. I'll begin at the beginning, if that's what you're drivin' at.

'This shop belonged to my uncle—mother's brother— afore I got it. I suppose it was hangin' about here, when I was quite a little un, that first gave me a taste for birds. Uncle didn't mind my comin', though he wouldn't speak to mother. She hadn't pleased him by her marriage—father was a nightman, and, what's worse, he was a drunken scamp. He used to thrash poor mother, and blacken her poor eyes. No, I don't suppose she was a beauty, because folks used to say I was the picture of her, but she was beautiful to me because she was al'ays so fond of me, an' I used to want to grow big enough to hit father back so as to hurt him. Little as I was, I'd pitch into him. Sometimes he'd laugh, and say, "Jack's a chip o' the old block;" an' sometimes he'd fetch me a awful clout, or give me a kick with his great heavy boots that pretty nigh broke my bones. That was accordin' to the mood he was in an' the drink he'd had. When he was very good-tempered, he'd take me to the public with him, an' make me tipsy for a lark. Yes, beer, and gin, too, he used to give me. "Now then, Jack, open your tatur-trap an' have some Jacky," he'd say, an' the other men would laugh when they see me reelin' about. Once there was a man, though, that knocked the glass out of father's hand when he was giving me the gin. "If you're a beast," says the man, "don't make that poor little kid one." He an' father had a fight then, an' the t'other man licked. After that father could never get me into a public—I'd cut away

like a scalded cat when he wanted to get hold of me. I'd never really liked the burnin' stuff, for it used to make me sick, but you see, I'd thought it game to drink it—as if I was a man like—till the chap that said I shouldn't have it gave father a hidin'. I'm thankful to say I've never touched spirits since, an' it ain't often that I take a glass o' beer. Not that there's any harm in that, if people would only take it in moderation, an' could get it genuine, instead of soakin' theirselves wi' gallons o' doctored stuff. When I was seven or eight, as I reckon, poor mother died; an' a week or two after that father ran away. When I got back in the evening to the room we had, "Dad's cut his stick, Jack," the other folks said, "you'd best go to your rich uncle." Sure enough father was off, and everything in the room he'd taken. There was only the dust left like there is in a holler nut. When I got to the shop here, uncle was puttin' up his shutters. He was very grumpy at first, an' said it wasn't his business to keep other men's kids. But at last he said I might come in for the night, an' he'd see what was to be done about me in the mornin'. However, I stayed on with him after that for two years an' more. He pretty well made me earn my grub an' my clothes, an' neither was first-rate. However, he taught me to read an' to write, an' to cipher a bit, an' ever so many years after he left me his business, because he hadn't nobody else to leave it to; so I won't say anythin' against him.'

'Well, to be honest, Mr Jones, I don't see that you have much reason to.'

'P'r'aps not, sir, but, as you may suppose, there wasn't

much love lost between us. He was al'ays snappish with me. So I took to the birds an' things, an' made friends o' them. You can't get on, I fancy, without some-thin' to be fond on. Uncle had a natural history book or two, an' I read 'em on the sly, an' that made me fonder than ever o' the birds, an' o' the country too, though I'd never seen any—not real country, I mean. When the ketchers came to sell their birds to uncle, I al'ays got a talk with them if I could, an' I thought there couldn't be a pleasanter life than theirs was. There was one young feller who didn't go in so much for birds as for the nestes, an' he got hedgehogs, an' ferns, an' primrose roots, an' such things at odd times. He mostly sold for hisself in the streets, but now an' then he'd bring things to the shops. Well, this young feller said I might come with him for a day, if I could get leave. I knew 'twas no use askin' leave, so I took it. I undid the back-door, an' climbed over the back-wall, where the young feller was waitin' for me. Grimes Street wasn't built in then as it is now. We'd to start a good bit before the sun was up. The streets were so quiet they seemed quite strange. It made you jump like to hear a church clock strike, an' then we got out on the country roads, an' the sun come up, an' the birds began to sing—the larks was singin' afore he come up—an' there was nothin' but hedges, an' trees, an' fields—I'd never felt half so jolly.'

'Which way were you going?'

'We got down somewhere out by Ongar, an' had a snack an' a snooze on a old haystack, an' then we worked across country. We turned up all the quiet little lanes

that seemed to lead to nowhere, and scrambled through hedges, an' climbed up trees, and cut across medders. I could scarce believe I was the same lad I was the day afore. I felt just as if I'd died, an' woke up in heaven, or fairyland, or somewhere. The country was so fresh and clean, an' the dew-drops was on the spiders' webs, and there was no end o' wild-flowers everywhere. People talk as if Essex wasn't much, but I never saw such a sight o' wild-flowers in any other county I've worked, an' I've worked 'em all round London. Everythin' was so quiet, too, except the birds an' the insects, an' the wind a-rustlin' in the leaves. You could hear a cart a mile off. We got a lot o' nestes—leastways, my pal did, for I wasn't much hand at findin' 'em then. We couldn't take home half we come across. We got a cuckoo's egg, I remember—but we got all kinds o' eggs, of all sorts, an' sizes, an' colours. I was new to the work then, an' they were as good to me as guineas in a purse when I see the smooth, spotted things snugglin' in the moss. We had a bit o' bread an' cheese for dinner in a old churchyard with fields all round, an' the old church seemed made o' nestes. There was ivy all over it that was capital to hold by, an' we got out on the top o' the tower, for the door was ajar, an' so we went in. The pews were all white-washed, I remember, an' the air inside seemed as if it was dead like. In that old church we got owls' eggs an' martins', an' jays', an' jackdaws', an' starlingses'. An' we climbed up the elms in the churchyard, an' got some rooks' eggs. We came so sudden upon a clutch o' pa'tridge-eggs in some young corn that I smashed three

on 'em. I can remember it just as if it was yesterday. Of course, I was goin' to grab 'em at once, but my mate said, 'See, if there isn't a keeper a-lookin',' an' then he whipped 'em up. 'Them as I sell 'em to won't ax me how I come by 'em,' says he, 'an' you shall go halves.' That made me understand that it was somehow stealin', but I couldn't make out why we hadn't as much right to take them as the t'others, an' I can't make it out yet.'

'But it was poaching.'

'I don't care what ye call it—wild birds' eggs *is* wild birds' eggs. It's diff'rent no doubt with pheasants when a man breeds 'em an' fegds 'em just like fowls, an' they're almost as tame to be shot, but I can't make out how pa'tridges in a field can be any man's property any more than the larks t'other side o' the furrow. I got a fine weltin' from uncle when I got back the day after for leavin' the door unlocked an' him to do everythin', but that didn't keep me from slippin' out agin. The young feller I went with used to give me some o' what he got for what we took, and, of course, I had no objection, but it wasn't that that made me go. I liked the free life, an' gettin' to see the birds an' that in their own homes. When I'd seen 'em there, it was twice as nice to read about 'em.'

'But you couldn't find birds' nests all the year round.'

'That's a fact I'm fully aware on, sir. Besides bird-nestin', I used to go rushin' an' root-gatherin', an' Christmasin', an' ketchin' hedgehogs and squirrels, an' snails an' frogs for the birds an' the Frenchfolk, an' snakes, an'

effets, an' all kinds o' things, with that young feller. Sometimes one o' the birdketchers would take me out with him. At last uncle got tired o' weltin' me, and o' me too. 'You're no good to me, Jack,' says he, 'an' I don't think you'll ever do any good for yourself. I'd ha' brought you up respectable if you'd ha' let me, though my sister was a fool to marry that blackguard father o' yours, but you wouldn't let me. So now, as you've made up your mind to be a wagabone, I'll have nothin' more to do with you, 'cept to start you with a bird-net, an' buy your birds, when you've any worth buyin', just as I would of any other feller.' He did give me a decent net that he'd bought second-hand, and a real capital call-bird out of his shop, and a stuffed bird or two like them I've got on the twigs there, for decoys, an' a trifle o' tin, and then he called me a ungrateful young scamp because I looked so jolly. I felt set up, you see, an' all the time I was at it I managed to make a livin' out o' the bird-ketchin', more or less, though sometimes it was a good bit less than more, though that wasn't often.'

'How do you catch the birds, Mr Jones?'

'Why, at odd times I'd go out at night with a mate or two an' ketch with a net an' a lantern. You beat the ledges, you see, and then the birds fly at the lantern like moths to a candle, an' you fold the net over 'em. But I used to like nettin' by day best, all by myself. I caught more, an' they was all my own, an' then I wasn't bothered with other people's talk. I'd buy a book from time to time, an' I read a deal in those days, an' had time to think o' what I read, an' the things about me, an' other things, too. Some-

times I wished I couldn't think—it bothered me, when I might ha' been so jolly else, lyin' on the hot grass, with everythin' so sweet about me. At times though I wouldn't bother myself, but just enjoy myself doin' nothin' except smoke my pipe, whilst I was waitin' for the birds to light. I'd look at the blue sky an' the green trees, as they call 'em, though when you're used to look at trees, lots of 'em ain't green, but all kind o' colours that wouldn't be believed if they was put in a pictur'. Cowper says—

“No tree in all the grove but has its charms,
Though each its hue peculiar;”

an' then agin—

“The sycamore, capricious in attire,
Now green, now tawny, and, ere autumn yet
Have changed the woods, in scarlet honours bright.”

‘You seem to be fond of Cowper?’

‘Yes, I was very fond o’ Cowper in those days—not o’ the preachy bits, but the bits about the country. I don’t like the preachy bits—they sound so narrer like for a man as must ha’ loved natur’ as he did—any journeyman parson could ha’ done that kind o’ thing as well, it seems to me.’

‘Don’t be rude, Mr Jones, and don’t run down your favourite poet because you don’t like parsons. Cowper helped you to enjoy the country.’

‘Yes, I used to enjoy myself in those days when I didn’t bother myself wi’ thinkin’. I’ve read o’ somebody that could tell what tree each was by the sound the wind made in the leaves. I can’t quite believe that, but it’s

wonderful what a wariety there is in the wind—on a summer day, too, when it seems half asleep. An' then there was the corn a-springin', an' the wood-pigeons cooin' as if they was gettin' their little uns off to sleep, an' the cows standin' up to their knees in the ponds, or up to their bellies in the grass that looked coolin'er than the muddy ponds, an' watchin' me through the hedges wi' their great brown eyes, as if they couldn't just make me out, but it wasn't worth botherin' their heads much about such as me. Did you ever notice the way cows look at you, sir—as if you was a bad riddle? There's other things does the same, an' yet we talk about bein' lords o' the creation an' all that. I should like to hear the opinions o' what we call the "inferior animals" about us—it wouldn't be very flatterin', I expect. Why, there was I, couldn't ketch the little birds, without gettin' little birds to help me. It seems mean somehow, don't it, sir? Sometimes I'd turn over an' try to get a half a foot or so of grass off by heart—every blade an' flower an' leaf an' everythin'. *You* do that, sir, an' then you try another an' see the diff'rences, an' then you remember what lots o' diff'rences there is in one acre o' turf, and what millions o' diff'rences there must be in the world, let alone the stars, an' you won't think much o' your knowledge, however wise you'd fancied yourself afore. You'd feel as if you'd got a knock on the head that had made you stupid like, an' it wasn't much use learnin' anythin' when there's such a lot behind that you can't learn. When I reads in the papers about the "deplorable ignorance of thousands even in this enlightened age," I can't help thinkin' that the paper chaps

are givin' themselves airs about precious little. *Their* knowledge will never get 'em down and worry 'em, I reckon. They've got their books to run to, when they don't know about a thing; but that ain't knowledge, to my thinkin', an' if they'd got in their heads everythin' that was ever writ in a book since the world was, they'd ha' got hold o' a pack o' lies, I guess, an' if it was all true, it 'ud be nothin' to what hadn't been writ about. But it was other kinds o' things that used to bother me, as well as things o' that kind—what I read in the Bible, an' heard now an' then at church, and so on. One Sunday mornin' when I was goin' out ketchin', I come across a man who was givin' tracks to them he met, and puttin' 'em down here an' there wi' stones on 'em.'

'Wasn't he better employed than you were?'

'No, sir, I don't believe he was, and so I tell you plainly. I could ketch, but he couldn't. He didn't give any to them as were anyways well-dressed, though they weren't going to church any more than those he did give 'em to. That seemed comical—as if a man would be sure to go to heaven if he'd got a good coat. That kind o' thing ain't good policy. "You are afraid to interfere wi' them as are well off, but you fancy you may lecture me—I mayn't take my liberty because I ain't respectable"—that's how a poor man thinks. I read the track I got when I was lyin' watchin' for the birds. I could hear some church bells ever so far off, an', thinks I, "now I'll have my sermon." I needn't tell you, sir, that I don't believe that we oughtn't to do any work on Sundays because the Jews didn't use to do any work on Saturdays,

but I do think it would be a good thing if we could get a rest once a week, an' time to think about somethin' besides grub an' money.'

'And yet you keep your shop open on Sundays.'

'Yes, I know I keep my shop open a-Sundays, but sometimes I wish I didn't. I don't profess to be more consistent in some things than them that call themselves Christians. Well, but about this track. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" was at the head of it, and it made out that heaven was like a go-to-meetin' Sunday, and that those who didn't keep Sunday like the go-to-meetin'ers would be damned for a certainty. I'd felt I might ha' been doin' better than ketchin' birds on Sunday, but talk like that wasn't likely to do me any good. "If that's heaven," I said, "I'd rather not go there." Besides, the track made God out to be as savage as a beadle that takes a pleasure in wallopin' naughty boys; an' that seemed downright blasphemy to me—I'd got a better notion o' God than that out o' the quiet fields, I thought, though I had sometimes ketched birds in 'em a-Sundays. I couldn't ha' said "Our Father" agin, if God was such as that. I used to say that for a prayer in those days, and, though I don't say it now, I try to feel it, an' leave Him to provide for me without my dictatin' to Him. So I tore the track up an' sent it flyin', an' the bits scared away as fine a pull o' birds as I ever see. I couldn't help laughin' when I thought how the very folks that would ha' blamed me for bird-ketchin' on Sunday would ha' said that that was a judgment on me for tearin' up the track. I often got into such a tangle in my thinkin'

that I was downright glad I'd to work for my livin'. I might doubt sometimes whether such as me was much worth keepin' alive, but still I didn't feel inclined to starve, so there was somethin' I couldn't make a question about. "You look to your net," I'd say, when I'd been moonin', "or things will be very taper."

'But you seem to have done well?'

'Yes, I made a very fairish livin'. I sold to uncle, an' to the shops Spitalfields way, an' round about the Dials, an' sometimes I sold on my own account. I got orders, an' trained magpies an' such at home, an' made a very good thing of it. When I grew to be a young man, I'd two decent rooms; one for me, an' one for the birds. I'd begun to get some decent sticks, too, for—now I'm comin' to it—I'd been fool enough to fall in love. There was a very good-lookin' gal—a market-gardener's daughter—that I'd often seen when I was out Hounslow way. She was a touch above me then, of course, but I licked a tramp that was rude to her, an' so I got to speak to her, an' after that she shammed to be very fond of me. She was the kind o' gal that liked to be admired all round. She wouldn't have minded the tramp kissin' her, I do believe, if he hadn't been quite so rough. That's the sex all over, sir—there isn't much to choose between 'em. I found out afterwards that she'd had no end o' sweethearts, but, of course, I didn't know that then. She'd talk to me quite kind when I went down when I'd spruced myself up, an' she led me on to believe that she'd have me after a bit, if I could get ever such a mite of a shop. She was uncommon fond of me, she said, but "bird-ketcher's wife"

didn't sound respectable. That's the sex all over, too—they may talk about lovin' on ye, but they look precious sharp after bein' respectable an' havin' somethin' to keep it up on, too. It's all bosh the stuff they talk in tales an' poetry about gals breakin' their hearts for poor young men, an' being fonder than ever o' their husbands when they've come to grief. I don't believe a word of it. If a man's gettin' on in the world, an' his wife's got spendin' money, she'll make a deal of him; but when he ain't gettin' on, won't she nag him! I'm precious glad now I was never married—to be valled just accordin' to what was outside of me. An' that's woman's love.'

'Foul calumny, Mr Jones. A sensible man like you ought to be ashamed to talk such rubbish.'

'Of course, *you* won't believe it—or you'll sham not to. It's part o' your trade to make out that women are all angels. Anyhow, that ain't my opinion. Men ain't much to boast of, but they ain't half as selfish as women. But I was fool enough to be dreadful cut up when I went down to tell Fanny that I saw my way to a little shop, an' then to hear that she'd married the new butcher. You see, she'd led me on to believe that she was almost as fond of me as I was 'of her, an' I'd been workin' double tides to get some kind of a home for her, an' I was all alone in the world; 'cept for uncle, an' he didn't count, an' I'd been thinkin' that it would be nice to have some one that was my own, an' that liked to be. However, it was all for the best. The chap she married was better-lookin' than me, I suppose, though that ain't sayin' much; an' he was more

respectable then, though Fanny would be glad enough to be my wife now, I'll go bail, for they soon made a smash of it. After that disapp'intment I grew fonder than ever o' my own company. At first I was out of heart, an' thought I'd let things go with a run. But that seemed silly to me then, an' it seems a deal sillier now. A man must be a poor sort that knocks off work because he can't get a gal to have him—it's just like a babby settin' down to cry because it can't catch a butterfly. An' yet it ain't pleasant to find out that fallin' in love's all a humbug, too—that them you fancied wasn't worth it, an', whether they was worth or not, that you can forget all about 'em after a bit, though you thought you was goin' to love 'em for ever, as you might about a dinner you couldn't get years an' years ago. It makes you more an' more inclined to doubt about everythin', an' I didn't want any teachin' o' that sort. However, I took all the more to my books, an' the birds, an' the country, after Fanny had jilted me; though it was a goodish bit before I went Hounslow way agin. Where we'd used to meet mostly was at the bottom of her father's garden, where there was cabbages an' such like growin' between the apple-trees. I'd pretty well got over the business by next spring, but when I went down an' see the trees in blossom, an' her not waitin' for me under 'em, it all come back upon me for a minute as bad as at first. You wouldn't ha' thought that such a old bear as me could ever ha' felt like that, would you, sir? It makes me laugh to think of it now.'

'I am only sorry that you did not fall in with a more faith-


ful sweetheart. You would be happier, and you would certainly speak more politely of women, if you had a good wife of your own now.'

'Well, as I was sayin', I went back to the bird-ketchin', an' I should ha' been at it now, if uncle hadn't died, an' left me his lease an' his stock. The fust week I was a shopkeeper the change carried me through, but before the second week was out I was downright pinin' for a free life agin. As soon as I'd got the shutters up on the Sunday afternoon, I was off into the country, an' it seemed to say, "Oh, here you are agin, old feller! Where have you been this long while?" I was so pleased to smell the fresh scents agin, that I stayed out till it was time for me to get back to take the shutters down on Monday. And since then, when I could get any one as I could trust to mind the shop, I've often taken the nets an' gone out for a day's ketchin' a-week-days. It was more of a treat, an' yet, after all, it wasn't as nice as it used to be, if you can understand that, sir. I seemed to be only makin' believe to be free, for I couldn't help thinkin' o' the shop every now an' then—it was like a bird flutterin' about with a string tied to its leg. You'd ha' thought that a chap that had led my life would ha' been glad to have a good home to go to; but it wasn't so with me. I used to feel dumpish when I got back. I never felt reg'lar at home here till I got Black Pete. The neighbours didn't take to me, an' I didn't take to them. I lived like a sulky bear in a holler tree, except that the birds an' that wasn't afraid o' me. Poor old Pete! He's the best o' company. He understands all that I wants him to understand, an' he

does all I wants him to do as if he liked it, an' he never bothers me with any jaw. Sometimes when I want to be quiet, an' the little feller, as is only nateral, don't, I half wish that me an' Pete had the house to ourselves agin. An' yet he's a dear bright little feller, is Fred. Now I've got used to him, I couldn't get on without him. There's another thing, too. Though I don't think much o' women, there was somethin' in that poor young mother o' his, when I see her lyin' dead, that seemed out o' the common—somethin' so pure like in her face, an' as if all her life she'd been thinkin' of others instead of herself, poor young thing. It's pleasant to fancy that, after such a life as she had, I can make her a bit happy by takin' care of her boy. I ain't superstitious, an' yet I often feel as if she was in the room a-watchin' of him. I've often felt it when I've gone to have a look at him in his little bed, afore I turn in. It don't scare me a bit—except to make me anxiouser to do right by the little feller. It wouldn't, not if she was to show herself. To have such a ghost as her in the house would be a holy kind o' hauntin'. Not that I believe in ghostes—but then you can't help havin' your fancies; and when they're pleasant, and don't do you no harm, why shouldn't ye?'

XI.

LIFE THROUGH DEATH.

 HE bird-catcher for years had contented himself with picking holes in other people's beliefs. He fancied that he was perfectly impartial—that he was an honestly sceptical truth-seeker. In fact, however, he was strongly prejudiced against any form of faith that had found expression in historical symbols. What he did *not* believe he could easily tell you : what he *did* believe it was a harder matter to find out.

But a time came when this pseudo-suspension of judgment altogether ceased to satisfy. He experienced a great sorrow, and then he longed for a definite creed. It was the death of Black Pete that brought about this change. The outcast whom he had sheltered richly repaid him for his kindness by opening a door of escape from the bleak atmosphere of the 'Everlasting No.' Pete had only a tobacco-stopper of his own carving to leave

his master, so far as this world's goods went, but he indirectly left him the priceless legacy of faith in Christ. For a fortnight the wind was in the east—'nailed' there, in sailors' phrase. The old negro had been for some time failing, and seemed visibly to shrivel up as hour after hour, day after day, that pitiless east wind still blew.

Rus in urbe was green all the year round, but its plants looked almost as 'perished' as poor Pete during those two bleak, sunless weeks. In spite of a good fire and sandbags, and the other little comforts which Mr Jones provided for his retainer, Pete had a benumbed look. All day long he crouched over the parlour fire, only noticing his master and little Fred, the fire, and the birds and the plants. When the doctor felt his pulse he paid no attention to him: as soon as the black wrist was released from the white fingers the arm fell like a log. Next to his master and Fred, and one of the canaries that used to entangle its claws in his grey wool, I had been Pete's favourite, but he no longer gave me a white-toothed grin of greeting when I went in. The only thing that seemed to rouse him in the least was when he saw his master or Fred doing anything that had formed part of his duty. Then he would give a feeble look of protest, but he had not energy enough even to attempt to carry his protest into action.

I had often requested the bird-seller to act as interpreter between me and the negro in a conversation on matters of faith. I was altogether at a loss to determine what he knew of spiritual things. He came to church in the morning with Fred, and was very anxious to imitate

as closely as possible the uprisings and downsittings of the rest of the congregation ; but, of course, this was nothing to go by.

Hitherto, however, Mr Jones had obstinately refused to aid me. He said that he did not know how to put my questions, and that if he did he would not put them. What would be the good, he asked, of confusing the man's mind? At present, he added, Pete was in the enviable condition of having nothing but the direct light of nature to guide him—he had never been perplexed by the cross-lights of other-man-made creeds. 'If he'd got your catechism *at* his fingers' ends, an' knew what it was all about, instead of rattling it off *on* his fingers' ends, as I've seen some dumb folk have been taught to do, just like the gabbling youngsters that can talk do with their tongues, could Pete have done his duty better than he has done it, poor old chap? Did you ever see a kinder, willinger old soul? No, sir, you leave him alone. You couldn't do him any good, as I see. You'd on'y bother him'—so Mr Jones had been in the habit of answering me. But I felt very anxious about the negro's state. He was plainly soon about to die. It was my duty to prepare him for death ; but how was I to set about it? He had become so weak, seemed so much easier when he could feel the fire, and see the foliage and the birds, that his gruff, kind old master had made up a bed on the sofa in the parlour. He had not been able to rise from it on the last day I saw him, although it was afternoon when I called. The bleak weather had broken up ; a west wind that felt balmy even in Grimes Street

was blowing, and even in Grimes Street the calm autumn sun was shining brightly. The bird-seller's recently moping prisoners were hopping and chirping with renewed liveliness; but Black Pete was lying on the bed more languid than ever, looking at the dying fire with a lack-lustre eye. Little Fred was sitting beside him on the sofa, stroking his face and holding his hand. Mr Jones went into the room with me, and at last I prevailed upon him to try to discover what were the thoughts about the next world of the poor fellow who had passed through this one so pathetically isolated.

The bird-seller took from the shelves that held his little library, Young's 'Night Thoughts,' and pointed to an engraving of a churchyard. He closed Pete's eyes, and placed his arms straight by his sides; then he opened his eyes, pointing to an open grave in the illustration, and going through a pantomime of digging a grave in the floor, lowering a corpse into it, and filling it up, and patting down the clods. Poor Pete was puzzled at first, but presently he pointed interrogatively to himself. When he received an affirmative nod in answer, he nodded too; but the only sign of fear he showed was to draw little Fred closer to him. His master next pointed upwards, but this only made the negro glance at the birds' cages, as if he was afraid that, unwittingly, he had allowed a bird to escape. He then tried to rise from the bed, as if he had been requested to get up. His master gently laid him down again, and took his hand. When he was quieted, Mr Jones pointed to the bed, to himself, the boy, myself, the birds, the beasts, the plants, the sky; and

then spreading out his arms slowly gathered them in again, as a token of the Universal Love. A light of pleasure danced for a moment in the negro's eyes—he seemed to have got a sudden glimpse of the divine truth which glorified the grotesque face and figure of its expounder; but then Poor Pete grew puzzled again, and pointed fearfully at the floor, meanwhile clutching the boy more closely, and spasmodically jerking his chin upwards to invite his master to come nearer to him. To re-assure him, and at the same time guide him, the stingy, pet-loving ‘infidel’ opened the window, and liberated his pet thrush; again pointing to the sky as it flew away. The would-be cynical old bird-seller had tears in his eyes when he saw the effect this had on the dying man. I left poor Pete clinging lovingly to his two friends.

When I called next day, three of the shop-shutters were up. ‘He’s gone, sir,’ said Mr Jones; ‘as good a feller as ever breathed, though he was a black; and if there’s a next world, he’s happy in it, or he ought to be, sacrament or no sacrament; and we’ll say no more about it. If you want to do any good, see if you can cheer up Fred a bit. He’s worse cut up than he was about his mother.’

It was because the bird-seller could not trust himself to talk about his old friend that he dismissed me so abruptly. I found Fred in the kitchen, with smeared face and swollen eyes, but he had already sobbed away the keenest anguish of his grief. Whilst I sat talking with him of heaven, and of Poor Pete, through God’s mercy, admitted to it—no longer deaf and dumb, but able to

hear and join in the angels' song of praise, the kitchen-door opened, and Mr Jones came in and seated himself by the fire. 'You'll think I'm growin' childish, sir,' he said, 'but I should like to hear what you're telling the boy. When those you really cared for are gone, it's dreary not to feel sure of a heaven. You can't bear to think that they've gone out like sparks on tinder—that they'll never come out o' the blackness again. And it seems cruel on'y to fancy 'em hoverin' about somewheres you don't know where—instead of housin' 'em for ever in a happy home. Poor old Pete! He did care for me! What d'ye think, sir? He gave me this just afore he died. He hadn't had time quite to finish it, but he'd been workin' at it up to the time he was took so bad. He must ha' seen that I had lost mine, an' so he was a-workin' away at this for me. Ain't it curious the pattern he took? It's the cross a-top the church clock-case on the parlour mankle-shelf. I'll never part with it, not while I live, I won't'—and as he spoke, Mr Jones, to the astonishment of Fred, sobbed aloud. I could not, of course, help seeing the incongruity between poor Pete's model and the purpose to which his workmanship was to be applied, and yet, in spite of that incongruity, there was something hopefully ominous in his last little gift.

When he had mastered his voice, Mr Jones asked—
'Would you like to see him, sir?'

We all three went up-stairs, little Fred clinging to me in terror when we entered the parlour. *Rus in urbe* was very different from an ordinary chamber of death. It was filled with a cheerful twitter instead of a brooding

sepulchral hush. 'He liked the birds when he was alive, though he couldn't hear 'em, an' they can't disturb him now,' Mr Jones remarked half apologetically. Then he reverently lifted up the white cloth, and we saw the face of the poor black, with a sweet smile upon it that made the sable features beautiful.

'Kiss him, Fred,' said Mr Jones almost sternly, as the frightened little fellow held back. 'Poor Pete was a good friend to you; of course you'll bury him, sir,' he said to me. 'Pete had a likin' for you, though he never heard a word you said.'

I did bury Pete, on a mild autumn afternoon; the red and yellow leaves falling as noiselessly as snow-flakes, and a robin singing its soft little hymn on the headstone of a neighbouring grave. Mr Jones and Fred were the only mourners. The old man started when I came to that triumphal burst in the lesson,—'We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump (for the trumpet shall sound), and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruption shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?'

When, too, we were walking away from poor Pete's last bed, the bird-catcher was muttering to himself, from the last collect, 'that when we shall depart this life, we may

rest in Him, as our hope is that our brother doth.' 'It's a beautiful service, that of yours, sir, right or wrong ; it soothes you about them as are gone, and yet it makes you think about yourself, too.'

Next Sunday morning Mr Jones was at church with Fred. Sunday after Sunday passed, but the bird-catcher's shop continued closed, and he continued to come to church. 'Of course, I must come to look after the little un, now poor black Pete is gone,' he said, when I expressed my pleasure.

But a strange change had come over Mr Jones. He had taken to reading his New Testament, no longer captiously, but as a man weary of a dusty road might put his lips to water running over a mossy stone. He had ceased to carp at any 'professional' remark which I might make, but he said very little to me about his readings, and I said very little to him. He was daily growing more and more intimate with Christ—Jesus of Nazareth speaking by words and works—and words of mine, I thought, would merely blur the impress which the Divine character was manifestly making even on the stubborn material of the bird-catcher's mind.

I do not mean to say that the bird-catcher suddenly became gentle in all his words and ways, and charitable in all his modes of thought. In spite of the goodness there was in it, his was a cross-grained nature ; and plane and polish as he might, the gnarled knots could still be seen. But, from the time of Black Pete's death, it was evident that he had adopted a new rule of life, and was striving with loving laboriousness to live up to it. He still said

tart things now and then, but he no longer plumed himself on his cleverness in saying them. His neighbours ere long noticed the alteration in him. 'Well, sir,' said one of my parishioners to me, 'if I'd been axed, I should ha' said, beggin' your pardon, that you was a deal too soft-like to get round old Jones, but, blest, if you hain't converted him, or else he's a-turnin' soft hisself.' It was nothing which I had said, however, that had produced the change in the bird-catcher; and so far from 'turning soft,' he had learnt the first lesson of real sanity—that man can only obtain peace by recognizing with humble gratitude his relation to a pardoning, succouring God.

'Grandfather says his prayers now,' Fred told me one day with astonished delight. The fact that grandfather did not say his prayers had long perplexed Fred's mind, and pained his heart. The old man was so clever, in Fred's eyes, and so kind, and yet he did not do the thing which Fred's poor dead mamma had taught him nobody could be 'good' without doing.


I repeated the remark to the old man, as a likely introduction to a little confidential conversation.

'Well, sir,' he exclaimed half-fiercely, 'it's nothing to be ashamed on as I knows of. *Ashamed!*' he added, in an altered tone. 'Well, *that's* sensible! It's made me feel more at rest-like than I've felt for many a year, an' here I am a-talkin' as if I was ashamed of it. What stuck-up beggars we are—don't like to be under an obligation even to God A'mighty. Well, sir, I'll tell you all about it now. I was fond o' readin', as I've told you, sir, when I was a young man, an' I tried hard to read

myself into believin' in Christianity. I got a Paley's "Evidences" second-hand in Goswell Street, an' I read it through. But then you see, I couldn't remember it all, an' so what was the good? . What I couldn't remember was like rungs out of the middle of a ladder. I warn't no nearer to the top with them gone. So I got tired of tryin' to carry Paley's book about in my head. I wanted to feel as the Bible was true just as I see the sky was blue—that don't want no provin'. Well, sir, I got all at sea. I thought it was silly to pray, because if God knew everything, and could do everything, an' was the kind God the parsons made out, it worn't only silly, but stuck-up, to tell Him what I wanted to happen to me—as if I knew better than He did. But when poor Black Pete died, I felt uncommon lonely, and somehow I took to readin' the New Testament agin, to see if I could git a bit o' comfort. And I did take it on trust to begin with—leastways, I wasn't al'ays lookin' out for reasons to doubt it—and it seemed quite different. I've got to believe there was a Jesus o' Nazareth as sure as I see you there with your umbrella, an' I've got to love Him, too, an' to want to do what He tells me. *He* says "pray," an' so I do pray—the prayer He taught them as was with Him. And it's wonderful what a help it is to me, sir, to try to do His will. I ain't a amiable sort, sir, you know, but when you say, "Our Father," you can't help thinkin' that them even as worries you most must be your brothers an' sisters; an' then you want to behave accordin'.'

XII.

BESSIE'S PARISH.

HE wildest colts make the best horses,' said Themistocles, 'if they only get properly broken in,' and wild little Creases, very soon after she had been lured into it, became one of the best scholars in our Sunday-school. A good many of the children, like Bessie, went to no other school, and therefore we had a great deal of *a, b, ab, b, a, ba* work to get through—most necessary under the circumstances, but generally rather distasteful to both teachers and taught. Bessie, however, revelled in the dry, rhyming columns, and rang their changes backwards and forwards as merrily as if they had been a peal of bells, as soon as she had learnt her letters. 'You look out, Fred—I'm a-ketchin' of ye up fast,' she exclaimed proudly to her young friend and fellow-pupil, the bird-seller's *protégé*, when she was promoted to words of one syllable in sentences. And although Fred, thanks to his mother's

care, read remarkably well for a child of his age, Bessie's was no vain boast. It was not long before she was Fred's class-fellow. She threw her whole heart into what she was about. So long as she supposed that 'learning the markets' was all that she needed to learn she devoted herself entirely to that study; but now that she had arrived at the conclusion that there were other things in the world worth learning, she learnt those other things with an equal ardour. Whatever she took in hand, she pulled at with a will, as the sea-phrase goes. As soon as she had picked up our chants and psalm-tunes, her voice, not only in the school-room, but in the church also, rose above all others—sweetly shrill. We were in the habit of singing the Old Version Psalm, in which these somewhat quaint, tautological, ungrammatical, but still stirring lines occur:—

‘On cherubs and on cherubims
Full royally he rode;
And on the wings of mighty winds
Came flying all abroad.’

The tune had something of the irresistible motion of a march in it, and that and the alliterative music of the second and third lines, between them, quite carried Bessie away. For some seconds after the rest of the congregation had finished the line, her ‘ro—o—o—o—ode’ could be heard ringing up in the rafters.

The variety of characters over whom our Blessed Lord exercised, so to speak, a magnetic influence during his life on earth is one of the most striking facts in his earthly history. The doctors in the Temple and the Baptist in

the desert, Peter and Pilate, Mary of Magdala, and Joseph of Arimathæa—those who agreed in scarcely anything else agreed in recognizing in their various ways the divinely exceptional personality of Christ. And throughout all the centuries during which Christ's life has been read, that marvellously many-sided influence has continued to act. Every one who reads this must be able to count up people by the score who have scarcely anything in common except a reverential love of Jesus of Nazareth. Social circumstances, dispositions, tastes, modes of thought, may seem to have dug impassable gulfs between the sharers of that love, but *that* makes them feel akin. It was curiously interesting to note the gradual way in which the character of Christ exercised its attraction on the little London street girl. At first she greatly preferred the Old Testament to the New. There was 'a deal more fun an' fightin'' in it, she said. The story of Samson and the foxes greatly took her fancy. 'Worn't that a knowin' game?' was her admiring comment on it. The trick by which Michal saved her husband's life was another exploit which made Bessie chuckle in a very infectiously indecorous manner; and she gloated over accounts of pitched battles and single combats. Owing to the bellicosity which her street-life had bred in her, the gentle forgivingness of the Saviour was to her at starting a disagreeable puzzle. She liked him for 'goin' about doctorin' poor folks, an' givin' 'em bread an' fish when they was hungry,' but, according to her original notions of nobility of character, it was cowardly not to resent an injury or 'take your own part,' and therefore the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount perplexed

her sorely, and she was utterly at a loss to understand why Peter was told to put back his sword into his sheath. 'He'd ha' fought, anyhow, if he'd been let, though they did all on 'em cut away arterwards,' remarked Bessie, trying in vain to make her newly-acquired belief that all which Jesus did *must* be right, tally with her old faith in the manliness of fighting. The first time she read the fifth of St Matthew, she had a stiff argument with her teacher over 'Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.'

'It can't mean *that*, I know,' exclaimed Bessie, decidedly. 'Do it, teacher?'

'It means what it says—it's in the Bible, and that's enough,' answered the teacher.

Any unsympathizing appeal to authority of this kind, as a settler, or rather silencer, of moral difficulties, does not, however, satisfy children, any more than it satisfies adults. It is far more likely to weaken the weight of the appealed-to authority in the estimation of those who are morally muddled. Bessie was not to be so put down. I have no doubt that she half became a little infidel—fancied that, after all, the Bible could not be true, if it taught things like *that*.

'But, teacher,' she persisted, 'if anybody was to fetch ye a clout a-one side o' yer face, would ye let 'em give ye a clout a-t'other? Ketch *me* a-bein' sich a soft. I'd do all I knew to give it to 'em back agin.'

But, as the months went by, Bessie's character underwent a very striking change. She was as self-reliant a little body as ever, but self (with half-grudged sacrifice to

Granny) was no longer the centre of her little system of the universe. One Sunday morning, when she had been at the Sunday-school about two years, and I had happened to look in just as the children were filing off for morning service, Bessie stepped out of rank, and walked up to me with great *aplomb*, and yet manifestly in great distress. She waited until she had seen the backs of the last scholar and teacher, and then explained her trouble. (In spite of her readiness in reading, and the near approach to correctness which the purifying and enriching influence of music gave her 'vocalisation' when she sang, Bessie's spoken English, down to the last day I saw her, was very nearly as heteroeptic and syntax-defying as on the morning we spent together on the Monument.) 'If you please, sir,' she said, 'I want to do some good, but I don't know how. *He* was al'ays a-goin' about doin' some good to somebody, but I don't do no good to nobody, though I goes about pretty much. I'm workin' walnuts now, and how's ye to do any good to anybody out o' *them*? 'Cept ye give 'em away, an' then how's Granny to live—let alone me?'

'Don't despise the walnuts, Bessie,' I answered, 'if they help you to earn an honest living. Whilst you are getting that you are doing your duty so far—just as much as when you come to church. If people were to come to church all day long, and leave other people to work for them and their wives and children, that would be laziness, and not religion. Besides, Bessie, "doing good" doesn't mean *giving* only. That is one way, and a very good way when people give away what they really have a right to give, and take care that the people

who have no right to get it *don't* get it. But there are scores of ways in which you can do good, though you haven't a penny to spare. If you only want to find them out, you're sure to find them out. Just look about you when you get back to Granny's. Charity begins at home, you know. It isn't doing good to make a great fuss about people out of doors, and then to go home and sulk or be lazy. I don't mean *you*, Bessie. I don't think *you* sulk, and I'm sure *you* are not lazy. But if you look about perhaps you'll find that there is something you could do to make Granny more comfortable or happier in her mind, and when you have tried to do that, there are the other people in the Rents—the children and the grown-up people, too. You might do something for them. But I cannot talk to you any longer now. I ought to have been in the vestry five minutes ago. Some day this week I will come to the Rents, and we will consult together then.'

When I called at Mrs Jude's I found that Bessie had very speedily acted on my hints. The floor had been scrubbed; the mantel-piece was no longer furred with dust. A little bunch of wall-flowers stood on it in an old medicine-bottle. The scanty crockery of the establishment was all clean, and arranged along the mantel-shelf. The window had been cleaned, too, and the few articles of furniture tidied up in some way. The battered flat candlestick had been rubbed until it shone like polished silver. Bessie, who was sitting at her grandmother's knee with a book on her lap, glanced proudly at this last proof of her industry, as it gleamed in the even-

ing sunlight, flanked on both sides with the clean crockery.

‘Why, Mrs Jude,’ I exclaimed, ‘you look quite smart.’ The old woman was evidently pleased with the altered appearance of her abode, but, of course, she could not refrain from grumbling. ‘Humph!’ she answered, ‘I don’t know what’s come to the gal. She come home from school last Sunday, an’ says she, “Granny, how can I make ye comfor’bler an’ ’appier in your mind?” “Well,” says I, “I should be comfor’bler if I’d things a bit more like what they used to was afore your father treated me so bad, an’ left me with a great gal like you on my ’ands.” “How was that?” says she. So I told her about the nice furnitur’ I used to have—real mahogany, sir—an’ sich like. “Can’t we do summat with what we’ve got, Granny?” says she. “Stuff an’ nonsense, child,” says I, “in a mucky hole like this.” “Well, Granny,” says she, “I’ll do what I can if you’ll tell me how.” An’ so she went on botherin’ till somehow, between us, we *have* made the place look a bit more Christian-like, I won’t deny. But Bessie must needs clean the winder, though I told her not, an’ so there we’ve got another broken pane, as if we hadn’t got enough afore. Spendin’ her money, too, on them flowers for the mankle-shelf!’

‘They didn’t cost nuffink, Granny,’ Bessie objected. ‘Jim Greenham give ’em to me.’

‘An’ if ye can git flowers give to ye, why didn’t ye never bring me none afore?’

‘Why, Granny, I used to think they’d choke like in here,’ answered Bessie; ‘but now I’ll bring ye some

whenever I git the chance. I *do* like flowers. They make ye feel somehow, when ye smell 'em, an' they look at ye, as if ye could be good somewheres or other. An' there's about flowers in the Testament, Granny—in the very chapter I was a-readin' when you come up, sir.'

'I didn't hear about no flowers,' growled Mrs Jude.

'Becos, ye see, I was on'y jist a-comin' to it. Here 'tis, Granny—"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin : and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."'

'Well, sir, I don't deny that that do sound pretty,' said Mrs Jude, in a condescending tone—as if she thought that courtesy compelled her to compliment the New Testament in the presence of a clergyman. 'But what I should like to know is how we're to foller what she was a-readin' jist afore—about not takin' no thought for your wittles and your clothes. I'd heared it many a time afore you read it, Bessie, but it was your readin' of it that brought it to my mind. We ain't fowls as flies in the air, or flowers as grows in a garding.'

'You'd look comikle a-flyin' in the air or a-growin' in a garding, Granny,' laughed Bessie, who had not lost her liking for looking at the ludicrous side of things. The old woman's temper was ruffled by her grand-daughter's irreverent conceit, and she paid very divided attention to the explanation I tried to give her of her difficulty. So I contented myself with reading the whole of the latter part of the chapter to her, that it might teach its own lesson—a plan which I have often found to be efficacious

under similar circumstances. Except in so far as it removes difficulties caused by differences of time and place, or gives a passing hint that enables one's hearers to make a personal use of circumstances that seem at first things that can have nothing to do with *them*, the less exposition is mixed up with the reading of the Scriptures in the houses of the poor the better, I think. The mere reading of a chapter may, I know, be made as mechanical an operation as the twirling of a 'praying cylinder,' on the part both of the reader and the hearer; but when the reading is not a perfunctory performance of official duty, the words have often a marvellous power of explaining themselves for purposes of edification. Mrs Jude echoed the last sentence of the chapter, and gave also, without knowing it, Jeremy Taylor's comment on the text.* 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' she said. 'Ah, that it be. I'm tired to the very tips o' my finger nails. You never knew what it was to ache all over in your lines an' every one o' your j'int's—you never stood at a wash-tub, sir—so it's easy talkin'. But I won't deny that I can't rest my legs to-night by thinkin' how tired they'll be to-morrer an' day after. I mayn't be alive to-morrer. I can't last long, slavin' as I do, an' then, when you've lost me, you'll know how good I've been to you, Bessie. But I won't deny, sir, that you must ha' took pains wi' her readin', an' I've no objection to her readin' to me agin. Now we've

* 'Sufficient, but not intolerable. But if we look abroad, and bring into one day's thoughts the evil of many, certain and uncertain, what will be and what will never be, our load will be as intolerable as it is unreasonable.'

done up the place a bit, you can sit down in a bit o' comfort, an' it's a beautiful book to listen to, I won't deny ; though it do make ye feel that ye ought to be somehow as ye ain't. But there's myst'ries none of us knows the rights on, wise as we may think, ourselves, I guess.'

In spite of the parting shot at myself, I could see that Bessie had made a very good beginning on Granny. The clearing up of their room—although Bessie had been the chief agent in the joint-stock operations of which Mrs Jude (except in the case of the broken window) claimed the chief credit—led to greater personal cleanliness and tidiness in both. The reading of the Bible at home led to Mrs Jude's being prevailed upon to go to church again, although her church-going *was* only very slightly profitable to her in a pecuniary point of view.

She never became what is called 'a cheerful Christian,' but I believe that, in a genuine sense, she did at last become a Christian. She learnt to feel the saving power of the Divinity manifested in Christ—to know that she *ought*, at any rate, to think little of herself, and to strive hard, and pray hard, for the curbing of her unchristian temper, and the cultivation of a more Christian character.

Bessie's missionary work amongst her neighbours was not quite so judiciously begun. The brave little body went about reproving sin of all kinds like a little Nathan, with a considerable infusion of the small Pharisee, and the sinners would not 'stand her cheek.' Bessie was very proud at first of the persecution she had provoked, but when she found that no good came of it, she adopted a quieter tone. When I think that any one is actuated by a good

motive—which can have been given only by ‘the good God’—(to use what is a pleonasm in English), I am very reluctant to interfere with the modes of action to which that motive urges, simply because they do not tally with my own idiosyncrasy. But I suggested to Bessie that only the Sinless Man had a right to speak to sinning men and women as if He did not share their sinfulness, and that that was a stand-point which He did not take. Bessie’s quiet work succeeded far better than her Boanerges business. She became more carefully anxious than she had been before to make her conduct harmonize in little things—which, as a rule, because they are always turning up for notice, are really great things—with the principles she professed. She conquered the prejudices entertained against her by the young folks of the Rents very speedily. As soon as she ‘larked’ with them, in an innocent way, again, she was so good a hand at larking that she secured us sundry even of the least likely of her boy and girl neighbours as pupils for our Sunday-school. She used to introduce the half-scared, half-saucy, shock-headed tatterdemalions with ‘Here’s another, sir’—much as if she had lugged in a ragged, restive colt from the marshes by the bur-buttoned mane.

That she ever did much amongst the adults of the Rents, I cannot say, but she did something. After a time they ceased to snub her and swear at her. They even recovered a good deal of the kindly feeling they had entertained towards her before she had taken to being ‘a saint.’ With a difference, however. They felt that she was no longer ‘their sort,’ and though they could not help

owning to themselves that it was *she* who had risen by the change, the necessity of being obliged to make such a confession even to themselves somewhat chilled their friendly feeling for little Bessie. She proved herself such a willing, helpful little body, however, in the way of fetching water, running to the chandler's, nursing babies that must otherwise have been tossed about in the Rents' gutter very much like its cabbage-stalks, at odd times of her very scanty leisure, that two or three of the Rents' women who had very large families, came to church now and then out of gratitude to her. It was partly genuine gratitude, looking back upon the past. Bessie had helped them, and so they wanted to please her by going to a place to which she said they ought to go. But it was partly, also, I must own, the prospective gratitude which cynical cleverness has defined. 'I was at church yisterday arternoon, so you'll come an' nuss my Johnny, won't ye, Bessie?' is a specimen of the appeals that were often made to my little lay assistant. She was greatly amused when I called the Rents her 'parish.' 'Anyhow,' she said, slyly, 'there's people in the Rents that'll let *me* talk to 'em, as wouldn't let a parson inside their places—let alone a missionary. Why, Big Sam's wife—he's the fightin' sweep, you know, sir—pitched a missionary into the dust-cart, an' she said she'd serve you jist the same; but I said she shouldn't—not if I was by to help ye.'

One of Bessie's parishioners was of a very different type from any I have as yet referred to: an old apple-woman who 'pitched' just outside the mouth of the Rents. Bessie ran evening errands for her, and some-

times kept her stall for her when the old woman wanted to go home for a little time. When rheumatism laid the poor old body up, Bessie looked in before she started on her rounds, to light her old friend's fire for her, and make her as comfortable as she could for the day. As soon as weary little Bessie got back from her rounds, she looked in again on Mrs Reynolds—thereby making Mrs Jude feel very jealous, in spite of her hard struggles to think that it was all right that Bessie should do so when she knew (as was always the case when she did it) that her Granny was not 'ailing more than ordinary.' Mrs Reynolds was a widow, without a soul in the world to care for her but Bessie; and she doted on Bessie accordingly. She was a very simple-minded woman, strictly honest, and willing to 'do anybody a good turn,' in her little way; but so far as any definite belief about God's government of the world was concerned, her mind was a blank sheet when Bessie first took her in charge. Her heart, nevertheless, was half-consciously thirsting for something that would make life a more satisfying thing than merely giving fair ha'porths of apples in a muddy street. However fair she might make them, she did not feel comfortable when she got home at night. She wanted something to make her feel at peace, though what it was she could not tell. She found out soon after Bessie had begun to read the New Testament to her. 'Lor, sir,' said the old woman to me once, 'that little gal's been next door to a hangel o' light to me. Afore she come an' read to me, I knew I wasn't as good as I might be, but I comforted myself wi' thinkin' I was as good as my neighbours. But there

she read about him as called hisself the chiefest o' sinners, arter all he'd done—an' what had I done like him? I was awful scared at first, but then she'd read to me about Jesus, too, an' she talked to me about Jesus in a surprisin' manner for a little gal like her. So now I try to do the best I can, and I just trust to Jesus for the rest.'

Systematic theologians might, perhaps, object to this creed of Mrs Reynolds's, but under the circumstances I did not see that I could improve upon it by shaping it into more regular form.

XIII.

CROWDED OUT.

WHEN trade is brisk at the East-End—when ‘works’ are going, docks and shipyards full, and shopkeepers are rejoicing at the raised wages that tinkle into their tills like summer-rain after drought—our East-End poor rates are still startlingly high. We have a mass of people who are very slightly benefited by these seasons of plenty. Then as at other times there is a fierce struggle at the docks to catch the eye of the officials who engage the gangs of chance labourers. The motley proletariat—one of the most melancholy sights in London—that musters for hire outside the dock-gates may be a little more hopeful than usual, but scores of them have still to depart unhired. The stimulated demand for their kind of labour cannot absorb its terribly abundant supply, and to the overstocked classes just a shade above the desperate destitution of casual dock-labourers—those whose callings require an

infinitesimal amount of skill—the prosperous season that enables the single skilled workman ‘to live like a fighting-cock,’ or, if he be a sensible man, to make a comfortable little pile at the Savings-Bank for the wife that is to be, also brings almost infinitesimal advantage. The Free Trade which prevented corn from mounting to famine-prices is the only kind of change in trade which comes home to these classes ; and to the memory, persons, and principles of those who brought about the great change referred to, thousands of these classes—more grateful than a selfish section of their skilled brethren—continue staunchly loyal. A shower of prosperity in the East-End, I repeat, only refreshes the fringes of very considerable fractions of its population. If this is the case when the tree is green, what must it be when the tree is dry?—when there suddenly comes a ‘depression of trade,’ followed by dreary years of ‘dulness?’ Rate-payers, who dread the workhouse for themselves, have their rentals burdened with a poor-rate supplement of as many shillings in the pound as West-End parishioners have to pay pence, whilst at the same time they lose a considerable portion of their custom, and a considerable portion of what they retain is carried on upon a system of long credit, which is often really tantamount to alms-giving.

I have witnessed so many of these seasons of depression that one is apt to run into another in my memory. I cannot, therefore, give the exact date of the circumstances I am about to relate, as they are jotted down on loose leaves in my Diary, dated only with the names of the day of the week. I might give many cases of distress

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as deep, but I have notes of no other that so fully bears out a fixed belief of mine in reference to the sufferings of the poor.

Some of the loudest complainers against 'luck,' are those who have most manifestly brought their misfortunes on themselves, and yet they will talk as if they were injured innocents whom Fate took a malicious delight in persecuting. But, nevertheless, no one can have a wide acquaintance amongst strugglers without having met with indisputable cases of want of success that is not traceable to personal demerit—laziness, insobriety, and so forth. 'Go to, ye are idle, ye are drunken,' is no fair answer when such people complain—although, generally speaking, they are the last to complain. It is of a case of this kind that I have now to tell. It was not until they were at their worst that I became acquainted with the disabled bread-winners, but it will be better to give their history in chronological order.

Sam Phillips, a sturdy, steady young fellow, with an arm almost as bulgy above the elbow as his father's—the blacksmith of the Essex village from which he came—had work in an iron-foundry in one of the Essex towns. It was not a large concern; but Sam had regular work, and though the wages were not high, they were better to marry on than the higher wages of London foundries, since in that quiet little town a comfortable little cottage, with a garden, could be got for less rent than a workman has to pay for a single cramped room in London. On one of these cottages Sam had his eye, and was fast laying up money to furnish it, and provide a nest-egg for

future savings. Some of the other men, who were fonder of beer than of domestic happiness, used to sneer at the regularity with which he trotted off to the Savings-Bank on pay-day. They sneered at him, too, for being a 'meetin'er;' but (as I gathered from his wife) they were afraid to molest him, because, though Sam was no brawler, he had a 'biceps' which they thought even a 'saint' might be tempted to bring into pugilistic play if too hotly provoked. The lass he had selected for his wife lived in his native village. They had 'sweethearted' ever since they went to the Sunday-school of the village 'meeting' together, and 'kept company' formally as soon as Sam arrived at the dignity of wage-earning manhood. The blacksmith was a deacon and the chief trustee of the meeting-house, and had brought Sam up in a holy horror of 'steeple-houses.' The town in which Sam worked is studded with old churches, but Sam never entered one of them. In very bad weather, he went to the Round Meeting in the town: on other Sundays, he walked over to the square little village meeting-house. The division of the sexes—which nowadays is looked upon as a sign of Romanistic tendencies—was strictly enforced there; but though Sam rather grudged being separated from his Polly, on the one day he could spend with her, during three long services, he found time in the intervals for plenty of Sabbatically decorous love-making. So far as the love-affair was concerned, everything went smoothly. The day for the wedding had been fixed; Polly had come to town one market-day, and gone round to 'look at the shops,' and advise Sam as to the things he was to buy for

the cottage, which was almost 'taken.' Sam was a proud man when he helped her into the carrier's cart that Saturday evening at the Old Swan, in whose tap-room some of his foundry mates were boozing. 'She's a better penny's worth than beer,' was what his face said, as he looked round at them, after Polly had let him give her a parting kiss upon the cart-step. She was going to be married to him in a fortnight, she thought, and so she was not going to be ashamed of her 'young man.' On the other hand, she was very proud to be helped in so respectfully by such a fine-looking, well-dressed young fellow.

But the very next day, after morning service, Sam heard news that damped his hopes. The blacksmith owed money on behalf of the chapel which he could not pay, but which was instantly demanded. If earnest were not paid at once, and good hope held out of the payment of the rest, either he would be sold up, or else the chapel would be seized and converted into a barn. Sam would not hear of either contingency—he had money in the bank, he could save more—and the consequence was that his marriage was deferred for nearly four years. As the young people sat in the suggestively sundering chapel, I fancy that neither was quite so fond of it as they had been before, but Sam used to say, 'Jacob served longer for Rachel, Polly;' and Polly used to say, 'I shouldn't care how long we waited, if I was only sure that we should come together at last, Sam.' But the 'at last' came when they were, after all, still young people. The furniture was not so plentiful, the nest-egg was not so large, as they would have been if the young couple had

been married at the time originally fixed, but they spent a very happy year in their cottage, and their first baby, according to the mother's account, was finer, prettier, and more handsomely dressed than any of the nineteen baptized along with it at the Round Meeting.

But baby had not been baptized a fortnight before Sam's master failed. The one or two other foundries in the town were still smaller concerns, quite unable to engage a single hand thrown out of work. Sam had to move with his little family to London. The proceeds of the sale of his furniture and the small savings of his year of married life—savingly as they were expended—were exhausted before he found work here. He came in fagged and starving one night to a starving wife feeding a hungry baby from a shrivelled breast. 'It's no good, Polly,' he groaned; 'I've tried all round, but there's no work going. I wouldn't care so much if it was only myself, but there's you and the little un!' And Sam drooped his head between his hands, and his no longer brawny arms upon his shaking thighs, and fairly burst out crying. 'We must turn out to-morrow—the woman says so, and then what's to become of you and the little un?' Whatever may be the depth of their own restrained distress, there *are* good women in the world who when they see their husbands—once strong men—brought down to crying, think that their sorrow stands far more in need of comfort than their own, and feign a hope which self-reliant man generally is far readier to feel, and express a genuine faith in God's goodness under all circumstances which the best men, when their pride is humbled, often

have to force. Polly put down the baby hastily yet carefully on the bed, and sat down on Sam's knee, and put her arms round his neck, as she used to do in the old courting times.

'Cheer up, Sam, old dear,' she said as she kissed him. 'I'd rather have you as you are than Tim Dakins that wanted to have me. You're twice the man he is, though he have got a bit o' money. You'll buy me a goold watch and a di'mond ring yet long afore he could ha' done. Let's kneel down now, Sam, and say our prayers. God's always good, whatever seems bad. There, you take hold of baby's hand, and pray for us all, Sam.' When he rose from his knees, Sam was a different man, and seeing the change in his mood, his wife went on—'And now we'll all go to bed, Sam, and I'll tell ye what I'll do in the mornin'. I'll ask Mrs Saunders to give ye a breakfast on tick, as they calls it here, to strengthen ye up a bit, and then you go out again, and see if you don't come back and tell me that you've got something to do.' 'It shan't be for want of trying if I don't,' said Sam. 'It's a come-down for a man that has a trade, and knows it, to have to turn his hand to anything. But anything I'd do if I could only get it to do—I'd hold horses or sweep a crossing.'

'Oh, you won't have to sweep a crossin', Sam,' answered Polly. 'There, give baby a kiss, God bless him, and then we'll go to sleep.'

Three weeks' rent being overdue to her, Mrs Saunders grumbled a little when Polly proffered her request in the morning. But the old woman had a kind of respect for

her lodgers, on account of the regularity with which they had paid their rent whilst their money lasted, and their generally decent behaviour.

'I don't doubt that ye'd pay it if ye could, Mrs Phillips,—that and the rest that's owin', which is ill-convenient to me, as has to pay, whoever don't pay me,' said the landlady. 'But I ain't a-goin' to charge for a bit o' grub, to give a honest man a chance o' gittin' his own livin': an' if it's *reg'lar*, I hope you'll stay on, for 'cept about the rent I hain't no fault to find, whatsumdever, Mrs Phillips. An' I'll send *you* up some breakfast too, poor thing. You look as if you could git inside of a gas-pipe, an' well you may with that big boy a-drainin' the wery life out on ye.'

The consciousness of having done a kind action made Mrs Saunders so cheerful that, when Sam started on his renewed search for work, she took off one of her old shoes by the trodden-down heel and flung it after him. 'Don't look back, or ye'll cross the luck, Mr Phillips,' she screamed, when he was going to pick it out of the gutter; and when he came back with good news about noon, Mrs Saunders gave the old shoe all the credit. We send missionaries to fetish-worshippers, but the amount of *bonâ fide* superstition—as idiotic as any that obtains in Africa—that is to be found amongst Englishwomen of Mrs Saunders's class, is humiliating from a 'philosophic' stand-point, and both humiliating and appalling from a Christian. The good news met with a less heathenish reception when Sam, after mounting the staircase three steps at a stride, burst into the third-floor back. Polly

had recognized his footfall, although it was so different from the languid foot-drag with which he had recently come up the stairs.

‘I’m going again now, Polly,’ he shouted. ‘Ten shillings a week more than we used to get in —. The first person I met in the yard was young Mr D——, who was learning the business at —, and he spoke up for me, and I’m to go on next Monday, and he’s lent me half-a-sov. to rub on with. I ran all the way back to tell you, and now I’ll run out and bring home some dinner.’

‘Let’s do something else first, Sam,’ said Polly, hugging her baby and crying as if some awful calamity were just about to happen to it, and then soothing its fright with hungry kisses and sunlight shooting through the big drops that still rolled from her caressing eyes.

And then the husband and wife knelt down, and Polly put baby’s hands together, and Sam gave thanks to God for his great goodness to them all.

For a few years things went well with Sam, although, perhaps, he was not quite so ready as his wife to regard as unmixed blessings the little ones that increased his family in rapidly regular series. When five fresh ones had made their appearance, he met with an accident which laid him up in hospital for months. He had not only broken his right arm, but also severely strained his back. As he was not a union man, Polly, as soon as their little savings were exhausted, would have been obliged to apply to the parish for relief, had she not gone out to work, as washerwoman, charwoman—any work that she could get. She had to lock the children up in the one room that was

then their home, whilst she was away, and many a time, when she was not washing or charing, neither did they nor she have any food until she came back at night with her hard-earned wage. But Polly never lost her faith in God, and once a week, at least, was sure to be sitting beside Sam's ticketed hospital bed, with a cheerful face and one of the little ones, both spruced up to the best of her ability, to make him think that things, after all, were not so very bad at home.

When Sam was discharged from hospital, work in his trade was slack, and his injuries had permanently weakened him. Once more he went round from foundry to foundry, but this time in vain. For a year or two odd jobs of the most miscellaneous kinds—and those only occasionally—were all the work that he could get. This was a mortification to a craftsman honestly proud of his craftsmanship, but Sam's pride had been chastened. He eagerly jumped at the meanest employment, but often had to endure the misery of seeing his wife and his elder little ones toiling at the dismal 'industries' by which people on the verge of starvation try to earn a farthing in London, whilst he could contribute nothing to the common stock. And then Polly fell ill, and he was obliged to let strangers nurse the woman he had sworn to cherish. When he had left her at the hospital, and was going back to his children, who, poor as their home was, already missed a mother's care in it, Sam felt, he told me afterwards, as if 'life was all up' for his and him. 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' he groaned, as he passed the grim little mud-splashed Independent chapel which he

and Polly used to attend as long as they had clothes at all decent to go in. But when he remembered who had said those words before him, he shuddered as if he had committed blasphemy. 'Who was *I* to complain?' Sam said. On his way back he called at the chandler's, and the chandler's wife, out of compassion for his children left without any mother to look after them, let him have a little more bread on credit. The little ones, clustered in the room that was bare of almost everything *but* them, had expected no supper that evening; and when they saw their father coming in with a half-quartern loaf under each arm, they almost forgot their grief for their mother.

The father and children ate their dry bread together, and then he heard them say their prayers, and undressed the youngest in man's clumsy style. The little one whimpered 'Mammy—I want Mammy,' and when it woke in the night, and its groping little hand found nothing but its father's rough face to reassure it in the dark, it cried as if its little heart would break.

The greater part of the time Polly spent in hospital was a dreary time for Sam and the children; but when Polly came out of hospital, Sam bore her off in triumph in a cab to a comparatively comfortable little home once more. Trade had revived, and owing to the brisk demand for workmen, Sam had found employment in his old craft again. The buffeted family spent the bright spring and summer in happy peace. Polly indulged in what a little time ago she would have thought the unattainable luxury, or the sinful extravagance, of half-a-dozen flower-pots; the elder children went to school; the family 'went to meet-

ing' again, and Sam and Polly had something to put into the plate when there was a 'collection.'

But as the leaves began to fall, the funds fell with them. The recently boastful city articles in the papers threw out lugubrious hints—cautiously worded at first, but daily becoming more openly prophetic of impending calamity.

One Saturday evening in late autumn Sam came home with fog drops on his whiskers, and an atmosphere of half-iced fog around him that brought a chill into Polly's still cheerful little living-room. 'There, Polly,' he said dolefully, as he counted out his wages on the table, 'take care of it. I know you'll do that, dear old gal, but there's only one week's more to come from where that came from. Our place is to shut up next Saturday, and when it'll open again nobody knows, and, so far as I can make out, everything is just as bad. We must trust in God again.'

'And who's better to trust to?' answered Polly. 'And don't you always trust in Him, Sam? I'm sure ye do, dear. Seems to me we've almost more need o' God to keep us straight when things are bright a bit than when we're down. We're apt to get bumptious else.'

An awful winter followed. Cold, famine, fever, killed the poor 'like flies.' The City and the West-End subscribed liberally, according to their wont, for our East-End sufferers; but our local mendicants and a locust-swarm of their congeners from all points of the compass appropriated the bulk of the donations—bounteous but still insufficient—that were intended for those who would work if they could.

This wide-spread misery extended far into the spring.

It was some time in May when our verger said to me, as he helped me to take off my gown after service, 'I've just heard, sir, that there's a whole family of decent folk dying, with nobody to look after them, in Dick's Buildings. Mrs Flack, that sits in the second free-seat, told me.'

When I reached Dick's Buildings I found many clamorous applicants for relief, but even there the case I was in search of was exceptional ; and, therefore, I had not much difficulty in finding my way to the damp cellar in which lay Sam, and his wife, and two of his children—the 'Reaper, whose name is Death,' had mercifully garnered the rest. Sam and Polly, with pinched, chalky faces, were lying side by side ; the children, with legs and arms like sticks, squeezed in between them. The father and mother were almost unconscious ; the elder child was languidly trying to put a laceless tag, which she had picked up, into a broken eyelet-hole of the one fragmentary boot she still possessed ; the little boy was slapping his mother's face because she did not heed his cries. I had the poor creatures carried to the workhouse. They recovered there ; and there I learned their history. When they were strong enough to move, our Emigration Committee sent them out to Canada. They sailed towards the end of a golden summer, and I accompanied them to their ship. It was a public holiday ; flags were hoisted on the church towers, and the bells were pealing merrily. On our way to the docks, thinking it might please her as a last memento of the old country, I bought a little bunch of flowers for Polly. 'Thankee, sir,' she said, 'you mean it kindly, but 'cept that my darlings are lyin' dead in it, I

don't much care for England now. I've got no home now, 'cept heaven, where, please God, I shall meet 'em, and partings is no more.'

'Seems as if you were glad to get rid of us,' said Sam bitterly, as he listened to the pealing bells. 'But, thank God, we're going where a man that will work can work. I'll make you a good home yet, Polly, please God; but that won't bring back the little uns, will it, poor old gal?'

'God's good—He's got 'em, and He'll take care of 'em, Sam,' sobbed poor Polly.

As the *Ottawa*, bound for the country of the red-skins, was warped out through the dock gates, the pale faces clustered on her bulwarks raised a shrilly ringing cheer, as if in defiance of the jubilant bells.

It was good for the emigrants, and for those they left behind, that they were going; and yet that shrill hurrah of triumph echoes in my memory as one of the saddest sounds I ever heard.

XIV.

THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE GIRL.



AFTER the service I have described at the Refuge, several days elapsed before I was able to visit it again. When I inquired of the matron what had become of her poor young county-woman, I found that she had left the Refuge on the Monday morning, and, although she had been offered shelter there for a week, she had not returned. 'I didn't expect she would, from the way she looked when she went out,' said the matron. 'Poor young thing! I can't help wondering where she is, though I do see so many as bad off that come and go God only knows where. Maybe, she's at the bottom of the river. I haven't seen anything about it in the papers, but the river drowns a many that the papers and the police know nothing about. I'm not a nervous woman, but I declare to you, sir, when I've been coming over London Bridge of a night, I've been afraid to look down into the water, for fear I

should see corpses with their eyes open. The lights on the river aren't nice to look at. Down they go, and shake as if they'd come to something in the dark they're frightened at.'

The shifting scenes at a Refuge for the Destitute are the reverse of kaleidoscopic, but they are as bewildering to the memory. The muddy tide of misery flows in to-night, and obliterates the marks made by the tide of the night before. A year went by, and probably the matron as well as myself had forgotten the poor girl from Buckinghamshire, when she was recalled to my recollection by very painful circumstances in which I had to bear a part. One night in the end of November, or the beginning of December, I was returning from Wapping by Old Gravel Lane. As I reached the dock-bridge I saw a dim, white figure scrambling over it at the other end. I had just time to run and catch hold of a woman's dress—another moment, and she would have been in the water. She struggled fiercely; she very nearly leaped out of the flimsy skirt that came away from her waist in handfuls. 'Let go you —! What does it matter to you,' she howled, 'if I want to go to hell?' I managed, however, to pull the poor creature back, and to hold her arms behind her until a constable came down the lane to discover what the screaming was about. 'What's up?' he inquired. 'Robbing you, sir? Oh, going to jump over, was she? Those Highway girls are always at it, when they've had a drop too much. What makes 'em all come down here, I can't make out. You must come to the station-house and make the charge,

and appear at the court to-morrow, sir. Come along, my dear,' he added to the girl, clutching her above the elbow and pushing her before him, 'we'll find you a snugger bed than that.'

The inspector-in-charge did not treat the case with the constable's levity; but he, too, seemed to look upon the attempted suicide as a matter of course. 'You see, sir,' he said, when the girl had been locked in her cell, 'it's startling to you, but we've so much of it. Those poor creatures—God knows I pity them, though they do give us no end of bother; can't get on without drink. It's impossible they should. The brazenest of women couldn't lead their life without it. And sometimes they can't get drink, and then they're miserable, and sometimes what they take only makes them miserabler. Anyway, the water's handy, and down they run screaming to make an end of it. It isn't many they've got to stop them.'

In no case is it more emphatically true than in that of these lost creatures that the way of transgressors is hard. The miserable girl's face was distorted by frantic excitement—she bit and struggled like a maniac, as she was dragged and pushed towards her cell—she dashed herself against the door and howled in the same mad style when the key had been turned upon her.

Next morning when she stood in the dock, bare-headed and bare-necked, and with her unseasonably flimsy dress hanging in crumpled tatters round her, she was an awfully lonely-looking object. Her excitement had passed, and she leaned on the greasily-grimy boarding of the dock, apparently utterly careless as to what might become of

her. The magistrate gave her the usual lecture on her 'sinful and criminal folly,' but he was a kind-hearted man, and was touched by her youth. Before committing her, he inquired whether she had not any friends who would take charge of her. (I had offered to do my best to get her into a Penitentiary, but thither she had sullenly refused to go.) When the magistrate made his suggestion, she woke up for an instant from her apathy. '*Friends!*' she exclaimed, in just the same tone of savagely-solitary satire which the Buckinghamshire girl had used. When I had seen the poor creature—her energy for physical resistance quite used up—obeying like a dog the officer's beck to leave the dock, I left the court, thinking much of her, and also of the poor girl of whom she had suddenly reminded me.

What had become of that poor Buckinghamshire girl? Together with her personality, the matron's forebodings in reference to her came back to my recollection. So far as they related to death from starvation—perhaps even in the dark, cold, swiftly flowing river—I could not help sharing them; but what I remembered of the girl somehow disinclined me to believe that she could have attempted to stave off Death by forgetting that she was a woman.

That winter she turned up again at the Refuge. Her former reserve and fierce defiance of Fate had vanished. She was thankful for what was done for her, and though once more brought down to the lowest rung of life's ladder, she was hopeful as to the future. She talked freely both to the matron and myself. I learnt her history, ac-

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according to her version of it, and the parts of it which I was able to test all proved to be accurate. I will relate it now.

Her name was Winslow—Jane Winslow. She came from one of the quaintly named little Buckinghamshire villages. In the heart of East-End London, it was strange to hear her talking of that sleepy little place. Of course she gave no set description of it, but, putting together her little bits of local colour dashed in here and there, I could easily picture her old home—the old brown church begirt with green-and-grey boled beech trees; the red-and-purple brick parsonage, bossed with brown beehives and veiled with verdant vine and creamy clematis; the low black smithy, with its core of ruddy light, its roar of bellows, musical tinkle of hammers, and fringe of round-shouldered loungers heavily circulating the village news; the beamed thatched cottages of yellow plaster and grey rubble, with female gossips chatting and plaiting in the low doorways and against the flap-shutters—their fingers moving even faster than their tongues; the old-fashioned rick-surrounded farm-houses, with their old-fashioned garden-jumbles of fruits and flowers and vegetables, grassy, crooked-boughed orchards, and barns and cartlodges with yard-wide patches of moss upon their thatch, and a rich arabesque of green and white and orange lichen on their warped, gaping weatherboards. Such a village, surrounded with quiet corn-fields, pastures, and dark fallows, deep fragrant woods, and hedges laced with dog-rose, and honey-suckle, and bellbind, we are apt to look upon as an island of purity and peace:—

‘This is a place, you say, exempt from ill,
A paradise, where, all the loitering day,
Enamoured pigeons coo upon the roof,
Where children ever play.’

Of course this is nonsense. ‘Alas!’ as the poet adds,

‘Time’s webs are rotten, warp and woof;
Rotten his cloth of gold, his coarsest wear;
Here black-eyed Richard ruins red-cheeked Moll,
Indifferent as a lord to her despair.’

In country hamlets, as well as the Tower Hamlets, passions rage with bestial ferocity, and petty grudges are cherished in the country with a spitefully persistent rancour, which the life of a large city seldom allows time for. In the country, as well as in our town-slums, there is much of the misery that springs from over-crowded dwellings, as well as from lack of food and clothing. Wretched as is the physical, mental, and moral condition of our city waifs, there are counties in England in which the average agricultural labourer is weaker in body than the average ‘City Arab,’ far less sharp-witted, and little, if at all, better-moralled. But still the country *is* the country: those who live in it can breathe sweet air, and see sweet sights, and hear sweet sounds, that constitute a literal ‘heaven on earth’ when contrasted with the surroundings of the dwellers in London slums. The Refuge, in spite of its warmth and comparative cleanliness, was still a gaunt-looking place, crowded with gaunt-looking objects, in the very centre of a London slum; and it was strange, I repeat, to get, so to speak, a whiff from summer bean-fields in that wintry barrack, as Jane told of her life

in the country. The greater part of it seemed to have been a peaceful one. Whilst still a child, she lost her mother ; but she was not old enough then to understand what a loss that is, and yet soon became old enough to appreciate the importance of keeping her father's house and looking after her little brothers and sisters. The father was a steady man, in regular work, and his wages, together with his children's plait-earnings, kept his family in cottage comfort. Jane soon managed all domestic matters, and enjoyed the deferential affection which a wifeless father and motherless brothers and sisters are apt to give to the eldest daughter of a family so bereft. But just when Jane was blooming into womanhood John Winslow married again, and his second wife was a vixen, who began to teach her eldest step-daughter 'her place' as soon as they came back from church on the wedding-day. For a week or two there were constant wranglings in the cottage that had been so quiet. John was an easy-going man, who detested rows. He loved his new wife, but he also loved his old wife's daughter, who had been the real second mother to his younger children. He tried to restore peace, but he was afraid to exercise authority over either litigant, and so his feeble efforts only made confusion worse confounded. Whilst he was away at work one day, the step-mother struck Jane because she had interfered to save her youngest sister from a smacking.

'I didn't strike her back,' said Jane, 'but I couldn't stand *that*. I put on my bonnet and shawl, and put my best gown and a thing or two more into a bag, and then

I come out and said to her, "I'm going to make a home for myself and them as belongs to me. If you treat 'em cruel, mother 'll come out of the church-yard and haunt ye. Poor father! I should ha' liked to bid him good-bye, but it don't matter much—he cares more for you than he does for me now." "Of course he does, you brazen hussy," says she. "Why ain't you off? I thought you was in a hurry just now. I shall be glad enough to see your back—a good riddance of bad rubbish. Why don't you go and make your fortun'? But you'll soon be coming back whining," says she. "I'll never set foot in this house again whilst you're in it," said I; and then I gave the little ones a kiss all round, and out I ran. When I got outside the garden-gate I saw the carrier's cart coming down the lane; so I waited for it, and rode into Buckingham. I'd my money with me—enough for that, and to pay my fare up to London, and p'r'aps to keep me for a week or two when I got there. The gleaners was in the fields, and after a bit I got the carrier to stop, so that I might pick up a handful o' ears for a keepsake like. I'd been very happy at home till that woman came to it, and so I wanted something to make me feel I still belonged to it somehow.'

Jane had looked forward to London with hope, but when she entered it her heart sank. How could all those people, swarming about like ants, get a living? The vast majority of them were very unlike the fine thriving folks she had fancied all Londoners must be. And if *they* could somehow manage to rub on, because they knew the ways of the place, how was she, born and bred in a little

Buckinghamshire village, and without a single friend amongst all those thousands to speak a good word for her, to squeeze her way into work?

When her money was exhausted, and still she found no work, Jane was sorely perplexed. In her country ignorance she had applied for plaiting-work in bonnet-shops, and had been laughed at for her pains. She had applied, also, at hiring-places for servants, but since she had no one to refer to for a character, she could not obtain a place. It would have been easy enough for her to get a character, if she had referred to the rector of her parish, but she was obstinately bent on keeping her stepmother in ignorance of her whereabouts until, without anybody's aid, she had made a home in which she could gather together, at any rate, her brothers and sisters. When all her clothes, except what she wore, were gone, she did obtain a servant's place—of the kind that might be expected under such circumstances. Several such places she took and threw up very speedily. Although her employers did not trouble themselves about getting a character with their servants, Jane was still very proud of hers, and self-respect—heroically honest, under the circumstances—made her risk starvation again and again rather than risk *that*. The last situation she had held before she first came to the Refuge was the worst of all. She had very soon discovered that it was not for a domestic servant she had been hired. She instantly left the house of sin, and a few nights afterwards made her appearance at the Refuge in the miserable plight and yet defiant mood I have already described. She thought that

she did well to be angry—that God was unjust in allowing her to be reduced to such straits. ‘I thought it was hard,’ to quote her own words, ‘that I should have to shift about so, as if I was worth nothing—me as had always tried so to behave—I was real downright self-righteous in them days. If anybody had called me a sinner then, I do believe I should have struck ’em. I couldn’t abide your talk, sir, because you made out as if, somehow, I must be to blame after all. But I know better now, because I’ve got to love Him that came to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’

When Jane left the Refuge on the Monday morning, she was literally desperate. She wandered aimlessly, with no hope except that the cold might soon finish her. In the early dusk of the winter afternoon she fell, fainting, on a threshold in one of the side-streets leading out of Leman Street. It was the threshold of a once-private house that had been converted into a ‘slop’-maker’s warehouse and workrooms. Some of the out-door women, coming back with work, found Jane lying on the threshold, carried her in to the nearest fire, and told their employer of her. He gave her hot coffee and bread and a night’s lodging, and in the morning offered to give her work. The wages he named were very small, but Jane jumped at them as if they were a fortune. It must be remembered, too, that, like most plaiting-girls of her time, she knew next to nothing of needlework ; and novices, especially when there is a glut of experts, cannot reasonably expect experts’ wages for their work. She soon grew an expert, however, in such rough needlework as was

needed there. The pay, even then, was only just enough to keep soul and body together ; but she was very proud of it, because it made her feel independent. At first she worked at the warehouse, but the talk she heard there was so distasteful to her—the fallen amongst her fellow-workers taking a fiendish delight in striving to reduce their unfallen companions to their own level—that Jane soon stipulated for permission to do her work in the bare garret which she tenanted. There are people in the world who do not like to be reminded that life is not so comfortable for all as—perchance, from infinitesimal merit of their own—*they* find it ; that all girls are not as pure and untempted as *their* daughters, running their little round of grooved and fenced-in ‘respectability.’ At the risk of offending such people—blinking their eyes at Truth over their cosy fires—I must say that Jane had to mix every day with girls who had lost their purity, and that her poverty sorely tempted her to follow their example. There was one girl, lodging in the same house, who night after night came up to Jane’s room, attired in tawdry finery ; scoffed at her dimly candle-lit toil, and tried hard to persuade her to sell her good looks in open market. I write plainly, because it seems to me childish—in no child-like sense—to pretend to ignore notoriously patent facts. This same fallen girl, I must add, was the kindest friend Jane had for months. She was not a constant friend. She often abused Jane. She was often dead-drunk, drunkenly revelling, or madly raging, when Jane was in great extremity—even the poor slop-work being intermittent. But still this miserable devil-possessed Magdalen had a ‘touch of God’ left in her, and

ever and anon saved Jane from starving, when purer people had left her to shift for herself. Just because of the multitudinous charities of London—absurdly overlapping charities—the number of deserving, unbegging objects for charity who pine unaided in London, is disgraceful (to say nothing of other considerations) to the reputation for keen common sense, ‘business-like practicality,’ on which Londoners pride themselves. ‘To him who hath shall be given,’ is the sentence which far too many London charities might take as a damnatorily appropriate motto.

Her fellow-lodger’s kindness had far more weight with Jane than her scoffs ; but Jane resisted both. ‘I don’t remember mother much,’ she said to the matron, ‘but I felt as if she’d turn in her grave if I went the way that poor girl wanted me to go—and then there was my little sisters I’d bragged I’d make a home for.’

But a more potent influence than the memory of her dead mother and her living ‘little ones’ ere long flowed in on Jane. One Sunday evening, foot-sore and heart-sore, she turned into a Methodist chapel. There she learnt the sad news that all are sinners—the glad news that all have a Saviour from their sins. When she told me of her chapel-going I must own that I felt grieved she had not learnt that inestimable lesson from church teaching instead of sectaries’ ; but the half-mean, half-filial feeling of jealousy was hurried away and drowned before and beneath the gush of joy with which the poor, half-starving girl repeated these verses from her new hymn-book :—

'O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of his grace !

'Jesus ! the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease ;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life, and health, and peace.

'He speaks,—and, listening to his voice,
New life the dead receive ;
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe.

'See all your sins on Jesus laid :
The Lamb of God was slain :
His soul was once an offering made
For every soul of man.'

Jane stayed at the Refuge for about a week, and when she left the matron cried as if she were losing a child. 'Oh, how I wish I was coming with you !' sobbed Mrs Wendover. 'The country must look so beautiful this fine morning.'

I had written to the rector of the Buckinghamshire village, and he had written back to say that the step-mother was dead, and that John Winslow would be most thankful if Jane would again become the mistress of his home. 'I thank you kindly, sir,' said Jane, as she was starting from London, 'and Mrs Wendover, and all that have been good to me. If you should ever come across that poor girl—'Liza Simmons is her name—you'll do what you can for her, won't ye, sir? She was very, very good to me, poor girl !'

XV.

THE FATHER OF THE STAIRS.



BETWEEN two towering piles of gloomy warehouses a dirty, narrow alley leads down to Pelican Stairs, so called from the crazy public-house whose bow windows overlook the river hard by. At low water a narrow causeway can be seen at the foot of the stairs, rising out of the steaming mud like the backbone of some monstrous buried skeleton. At the stair-foot, or along the causeway, watermen's wherries are clustered. A boat or two, on their sides, or bottom upwards, lie in the tiny square which forms the head of the stairs; and watermen are always lounging there with their hands in their pockets, looking with sullen discontent at the splashing steamers which have almost supplanted the wherry. When I first knew Pelican Stairs, however, one of those constrained loungers was a most cheerfully contented old fellow.

Having occasion to cross to the Surrey side, I turned

down Pelican Lane for the purpose of taking a boat. For a wonder, none of the loungers on the stairs saw me until I came out into the little square, and I was able to take in the picture it presented without disturbance. A hale, grey-haired, venerable-looking old man, with a wooden leg, was seated, barcheaded, on a low mooring-post. His right arm was raised, and he was addressing a little congregation of watermen and mudlarks. The mudlarks came up in relays from the slush in which they paddled with their trousers rolled up to their hips. Whilst they listened, they tried to roll their trousers higher and tighter, and then in a minute or two away they went again. But though the boys grinned, they seemed to like the old man for talking to them; and he appeared to be a favourite also with the saturnine men who stood around him.

As soon as I was seen, the little congregation broke up, and made a rush towards me. If I could have chosen a waterman, I should have selected the wooden-legged one; but no choice was allowed me. I was taken possession of, and somehow hustled into a boat, and it was not until we were a couple of boat's lengths from the stairs that I could ask any questions about the old man. 'Peter Smith is his name, sir,' answered my boatman. 'He's Father of the Stairs now Old Booty is dead. An out-an'-outer Old Booty were—out-an'-out bad, I mean. Peter ain't like that. Peter the Parson we calls him, becus he's got a way o' holdin' forth to us, ye see. An' what Peter says ain't bad. We should have ne'er a parson if it wasn't for Peter. The boys, too, likes his yarns about Labridory an' them parts he see when he was abroad. He was

'prenticed to his own father at them wery stairs we've left, but when his time was out Peter ran wild a bit, they say, and went abroad. But he see or heared summut when he were abroad that made a saint on 'im, an' he lost his leg besides, an' so back he come to London, an' he's been a-gittin' his livin' ever since at them wery identical stairs—sich a livin' as them teakittles will let a waterman arn nowadays.'

My boatman spoke with additional bitterness, because just then we were washed by the swell of one steamer, and he had to unship an oar to avoid running foul of another. During the rest of his pull he had nothing more to tell me about the Father of the Stairs; he was almost too grumpy to give me the old man's address when I stepped out on the stairs at the other side. He did give it to me, however, and a few days afterwards, at an hour when he was likely to be at home, I started to find out Peter.

A great part of the East End of London—notwithstanding its griminess—is very modern. Acre after acre might be cleared of the cheaply-built, dearly-rented hovels with which they are encumbered without doing violence to 'historical associations.' But here and there, in the midst of this flimsy modern masonry you come upon a bit of substantial old building. The lane in which Peter Smith lived was one of these old places. A dead dock-wall formed its 'prospect' in front and at one end; at the other brawled the bustle and the brutality of an East End river-side thoroughfare; but the lane was not a short-cut to anywhere, and so its quiet was almost

startling. The old one-storied red brick cottages, with half their room wasted in their unused roofs, their white doorsteps beneath their leaden-painted doors, their leaden-painted square shutters, fastened back from their leaden lattices with bulky wooden buttons, and their eaves-cornice of projecting brick-ends, looked almost as dreamy as a row of country almshouses; and the tenants, for the most part, were as neat and as quiet as their tenements. I found Peter and his wife sitting over their little fire. 'Well, this *is* a plasure,' said Peter. 'I haven't had a clergyman, not to speak to, for I can't tell ye how long, sir.'

'It ain't that we wants anything, you'll please to understand, sir,' the old lady explained. 'We has our ups an' our downs like other folks, but we manage to get along without being beholden to anybody, thank God. When we can't get what we want, why we just go without till we can—so *that* matter's soon settled. It ain't anything of that, you see, sir, but Peter's a likin' for everything that's good, and goes to church as reg'lar as the bells rings out—an' I go with him when my rheumatiz will let me—an' so it do seem hard that a parson can't drop in now and then to see how we're a gettin' on when we're a-doin' our best to encourage 'em. Not as I likes parsons that walks into poor folk's houses as if they belonged to 'em, but them as knocks, an' axes after you as if you were a friend like.'

'Well, *this* gen'leman knocked, Esther,' said Peter.

'I'm not a-denyin' of it, Peter,' answered the testy old

lady. 'I'm findin' no fault with the gen'leman. P'r'aps he might ha' come to see us a bit sooner, but no doubt there was others more important, though you do go to church so reg'lar, Peter, an' that's more than ye can say of a good many in this parish.'

With Mrs as well as Mr Peter Smith, however, I soon got on very excellent terms. It would have been a treat to visit them if only because they were not, like so many with whom I came in contact, very little if at all worse off, constantly whining for pecuniary assistance, or fiercely grumbling at not getting it. The old couple, as the old lady had said, had, no doubt, their times of hardship, but it was not so hard as to prevent them from preserving the feeling of independence which gave them honest pride and pleasure. They welcomed my visits because they liked to hear talk about the other world to which they were both fast, although quietly, drifting, and also because they liked to have a friend to gossip with about their past and present in this world. Long as their lives had been, it was only during two or three years before the married portion of them began that they had been, in any story-telling sense, eventful. But it was very pretty to notice how the mutual affection which had ruffled the course of those two or three years had lasted beyond the term of a 'golden wedding.' Although the old lady was somewhat irritable, she was never out of temper with Peter, and he looked at her wrinkled face as fondly as when, without a wrinkle on it, it blushed under his first kiss. Throughout their married life they had sought the peace

with God which passeth understanding—and when wife and husband both sincerely seek that, their home-harmony is almost certain.

And now for the history of those two or three eventful years.

Esther was the daughter of a boat-builder, sufficiently flourishing to think that a young waterman was no match for his only child. But Esther was of a different opinion. In the last year of Peter's apprenticeship he and she had fallen in love with each other. 'He was a fine young feller then,' the old lady remarked, 'an' everybody 'cept father said we was made for each other. Mother would ha' liked to see me take up with some one that was better off, but she wouldn't ha' had a word to say against Peter if father hadn't set her agin' him.' When Peter was out of his apprenticeship, he wanted Esther to marry him without her parents' consent, but this she steadily refused to do. 'You're young, and I'm younger, and we can wait, Peter,' she said. 'You needn't be afeared as I shall marry anybody else. 'But I *was* afeared, you see, sir,' Peter told me. 'When her father's got money to give her, a pretty young gal can't be sure who she'll be forced to marry, and, mayhap, I thought, Esther don't know her own mind, and she'll get tired of waitin' for a poor chap like me—though watermen made a deal more then—shillin's where they take pennies now. I knew nought about religion in them days. As things went then, I s'pose I was looked on as a steadyish young feller. But what I cared about was to get my own way. When I'd set my heart on a thing, I got savage if I was

thwarted. So when Esther wouldn't marry me slick off the reel I broke out. I'd been carryin' on at the Pelican one day, and was a sheet or two in the wind, when I got out at the top of the lane. There I met Esther. She looked first as if she couldn't believe her eyes, and then she looked angry, and then as if she was fit to cry. "Peter," says she, "you're shammin' yourself, and you're shammin' me—you'll kill me if you go on this way. Mother told me you was, but I said it was a lie." "It's your fault," says I. "You marry me right off, and I'll never go inside the Pelican again." Drinkin's bad enough now in these parts, but it was worse then—only Esther's father, don't you see, was a water-drinker, and he'd brought her up to believe—and very proper, too—that a man as got drunk was worse than a beast. "I'd never marry a drunkard, Peter," says she, "not if I loved him ever so, an' there 'wasn't another man in the whole world. Oh, Peter!" says she, bursting out cryin', "you're goin' the right way to work to keep father from *ever* lettin' me have you." Now you see, sir, I wasn't drunk—I was never really given that way. I could understand well enough all my poor Esther said. But I'd drunk enough to make me feel extra savage, because I *could* understand it all, and couldn't deny there was some reason in it, when I'd been wantin' to think that I was all in the right, and her all in the wrong. So off I bounced in a fury. "Good-evenin', miss," says I. "I wonder you ain't ashamed to stand talkin' to a low feller like me." And back I went to the Pelican. There was a man there I'd been drinkin' with as belonged to a brigantine down at Deptford goin' out

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to the Labrador fishin'. He'd been wantin' me to go with him ; so back I went to say I'd go.'

'Ay, Peter,' interjected Mrs Smith, 'and I went home, and ran up into my bed-room, and cried my eyes out. A nice scoldin' I got when I went down to supper. 'Cept what I'd learnt, or what was in the book, I didn't know much about prayers in them days, sir, but I made up a prayer for him out of my own head that night—that I did, Peter.'

'And God heard it, my old gal,' answered Peter, 'an' changed my heart, and brought me back safe and sound, 'cept for the leg I'd left behind me. An' that were a mercy, too, when ye come to think on it, 'cos it made me think littler of myself. "The pride of a man is his strength," an' I'd lost a bit o' mine—an' it's wonderful how well I've got on without it. *You* didn't think worse of me, did ye, old gal, when I come hoppin' up to ye like a sparrer?'

'I was sorry for ye, Peter, an' that I won't deny. Legs is a convenience for all parties. But a woman as *is* a woman, and *is* in love, ain't a-goin' to say she ain't because her young man has had a leg took off. Why, sir, I've heard of a ossifer as come back to Harwich from the Penins'lar with *both* his legs and both his *arms* cut off. When he got to his lady's house, he didn't know how to knock, or how to pull the bell, but she was a-lookin' out for him over the winder-blind. As soon as she'd run out and opened the front door, "Good-bye, Fanny," says he. "I wanted to see you once more, but this is all that's left of me, and, of course, I can't expect a fine

young woman like you to take that." But up she caught him, and kissed him like a babby. "You lost 'em fightin' for me and for my country, Fred," says she, "an' I'll have you as long as there's enough left on ye to see." Jest think o' that, sir! An' was I goin' to give up my Peter, as I loved so true, because he'd only lost *one* leg?—an' that partly because I'd angered him, an' poor father wasn't willin' to let him have me when he could ha' kep' me respectable—an' *that* he's al'ays done, thank God, though he *have* only got one leg.'

'Well, yes, sir, I do remember that time well,' said Peter, when I asked him about his Labrador adventures. 'You see it was the only furrin woyage I ever took, an' 'twas then I got my compass—you know what I mean, sir—the compass that's got the needle that points to heaven, sir. Why only a Sunday or two ago you was talkin' about it, sir; but if you'll not be offended, sir, you haven't azakly the notion of what a ship's compass is like. It ain't like them little toy-things where you can see the needle a-swingin' about and a-staggerin' as if it was drunk—the *card* moves about in the ship's compass—so when the skipper sings out, "How's her head, Tom?" you can tell in a moment, you see, sir. Now with them little land things, if you twist round the card at the bottom you can make the needle point Due South, and all manner o' ways, an' that ain't much of a guide—'cept that you're sure that the needle must point to the north, whatever letter's under—though you can't be sure of that nayther with them things. They made me think of the flighty folks that set up to know what's right of them-

selves. P'raps they're right—p'raps they isn't. Give me the old mariner's compass—and here I've got it,' added Peter, bringing down his brown hand on a canvas-covered, brass-clasped Bible.

'This was give me,' he went on, 'by a mate o' mine aboard that brigantine. Sam Woods was his name, and *Porkypine* was hers—*Porkypine* of the .Port o' London. I used to laugh at Sam at first, when I see him readin' of it, an' sayin' his prayers afore he turned in. But when we got into a jam o' ice, Sam was the coolest chap aboard. There was the ice growlin' away like thunder, and us tumblin' over the side to smash a way for her, and I was precious skeared, but Sam worn't. Now, you know, sir, when two men's together, an' one on 'em takes a funk, an' t'other don't, the one that does funk—though he don't like to have to own it—can't help respectin' the t'other that don't. I dessay I could have licked Sam if it had come to a fight, but that didn't make me feel any braver. "Sam," says I, when the wind had gone down, an' the ice was only snorin' like, "you've been the woyage afore—when are we to get out of this?" "Soon," says he, "please God—there's the fog risin' yonder, an' that means clear water." He was right, sir—the skipper made sail for the fog, an' we got through, an' we got out of the fog, too, into fine clear weather. Sam was a scholar. Says he, when we were talkin' about it, "Peter, there's mysteries over a man's life as well as the sea—but you trust in God an' go up to 'em, an' you'll come out in somethin' better." I couldn't make out what he meant then, but I've a guess

now. There was ice all along the shore when we sighted it, but I was glad enough to see land of any sort. We run into a bit of a cove, and it was queer to be able to take a walk. There was nothin' but ice an' snow to walk on, but still you could stretch your legs, and all of a sudden the snow melted away, an' we got ready for the cod that was comin' as soon as the ice was gone. They catch 'em with the net there, an' prod 'em out ashore with a big kind o' skewer. They hook 'em, too, though, an' bait with caplin. There's lots of fish—salmon, an' mackerel, an' herrin', an' all sorts—on them wild shores, that frown as if they didn't want nobody to come near 'em—dog in the manger like. The curin' work ain't nice, an' there's a lot of drinkin', an' after what Esther said to me, I was sick of drinkin' when I come to myself. Still I won't deny that, if I'd had a easier mind, I could have enjoyed myself out there. Besides the fishin', there was birds to shoot, an' bears, an' seals, an' deers, an' wolves, an' foxes, an' porkypines, an' hares, an' beavers, an' all sort o' animals the ladies here gets their muffs an' tippets made on—sables an' such. Some of the foxes is blue, an' some on 'em is white. We used to get jolly good feeds off the ducks, an' the snow-birds, an' the porkypines, too. I was in Labrador a bit, and got to know the ways o' the place. How do you think, sir, they find out which way the wind is a-goin' to blow? They hang up a wolf's head, an' which way that points, they say the wind 'ill come. It's whites that do that, an' there's somethin' in it, because the wolf when it's alive al'ays hunts to wind'ard. They're very frightened o' makin' bears angry—both whites and blacks

—they think there's a deal of knowingness, like witches, in 'em. They're a queer lot, them Esqueemaws, but the whites'—most on 'em's Irish—weren't much wiser in my time. There was missionaries—More-ravy-uns they called 'em, summut like our Ranters, I guess—an' I've heard that they do good, an' are very quiet little men, though they do give 'em that name ; but they weren't in the parts where I was. There was no parson, an' no lawyer, an' no doctor there. Everybody did as he liked, and got well the best way he could. Fortunately there weren't many as fell ill, or turned rusty, 'cept when they'd had too much rum. It's the climate, I s'pose. Fortunately, too, there *was* one doctor handy when I broke my leg in three places. I was out on the ice lookin' for seals, an' I slipped right into one o' their blowin'-holes. Some Esqueemaws pulled me out, an' this doctor—he worn't a doctor then, but a kind o' supercargo of a schooner, but he'd got his tools with him—he had me carried back to the hut I was livin' in, an' there he cut off my leg because he couldn't set it, and looked after me as well as he could, good man. Sam Woods had gone back to the London river in the *Porkypine*, but he'd talked to me afore he went, an' he'd left me this here Bible, an' told me what I was to read in it ; an' I read what he told me, sir, an' at first I was awful skeared, as I lay there in those outlandish parts all alone upon my back. The doctor was a kind gentleman—a very kind gentleman, but he didn't know nought about such things as that. "Keep your pluck up, old boy," he used to say as he come in, and at first it was very cheery to see him. He came into the dark fishy place like a

breath of fresh air an' a blink o' sunlight. But when he'd gone, i got mopish again—thinkin' about my poor Esther here, an' what was to come of me in this world an' the next. All of a sudden, though, I woke out of a beautiful dream about Jesus—shoutin' so that some of my mates run in to see what was up, "Go and sin no more. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved ;" an' them's the two texts I've tried to keep in mind ever since, an' a deal o' comfort they've brought to me, and others, too, I hope. The doctor rigged me out with some kind of a jury-leg, an' took me on to Newfoundland in his schooner, an' then got me sent on to London. When I got home, poor Esther's father and mother was both dead, an' the old man hadn't cut up as rich as was expected, an' she were livin' with her aunt. But it worn't none the less kind of her to take up again with a wooden-legged chap like me, an' come an' nurse my poor dear mother, an' then my poor old father. I went back to the Stairs, an' made a livin', an' we were wery happy—an' we've kep' so, hain't we, Esther? Esther had the root o' the matter in her long afore I had, sir, an' now Christ's the comfort both on us clings to. You'd be astonished, too, sir, if you was to see how some o' them swearin' mates o' mine an' larkin' young rascals at the Stairs quiets down when you speaks to them, kind but serious, about Jesus. They calls me the Father o' the Stairs, becos I'm the oldest skuller there, and really they behaves accordin'.

XVI.

MR WHITE AND HIS GRANDDAUGHTER.



I HAVE spoken of the substantial old cottages that may be found here and there in the East End; the substantial old mansions that may also be found there are still more striking objects, but even more difficult to find, since the once open space in front of them has become covered with cheap brick—their carriage drives, perhaps, converted into arched alleys, swarming with wrangling sluts, and half-naked children dabbling in the dirt with a duck-like fondness. I remember such an old house that was pulled down a few years ago to make room for a tall pile of bald ‘works.’ It stood at the bottom of a lane between whose crowded hovels there was just room for a waggon to pass. The only vehicles of any kind that went down the lane were bound for Lockman and Nephew’s, and when they got inside the great gates at the bottom of the lane there was plenty of room for them to turn in the pebbled court

in front of the old house. It was a mellow-looking old house of red brick and once white stone : grimy, of course, but the grime had a bloom on it like that of a blackened pipe. A semicircular block of stone steps led up to the front door. A flat square penthouse projected over the steps ; the lintel and the doorposts were richly carved, but smoky dust almost obliterated their cherubs' cheeks and trumpets, vine leaves, and grape clusters. Save that they were low-pitched, most of the rooms were noble chambers, but they seemed strangely bare of human life and ordinary furniture. 'Lockman and Nephew'—both long before dead and buried, but represented by the nephew's brother, Dingley—dealt wholesale in all kinds of twine and cordage. In balls, in figure-of-8 hanks, in huge coiled lumps like giants' pigtail tobacco, hemp, tarred and untarred, scented and filled the house. In business hours there were often a good many people about the place, but during the evening hours, in which I generally called, it was startlingly noiseless. The old woman, who pretended to sweep and dust the 'office'—once a pantry—and 'did for' the bachelor foreman who resided on the premises, dived into subterranean darkness as soon as she had answered my tug at the pear-shaped bell-pull, and piloted me from the little gate cut out of the big gates—jealously locked again as soon as I had stepped into the yard—into the dimly-lighted hall of the old house. The foreman was almost always out then. The old man I went to see and myself had the whole of the above-ground premises to ourselves. Sometimes we sat and talked in his scantily furnished room ; sometimes

we sauntered from floor to floor through groves of cordage that had a weird look in the dusk ; sometimes we had our chat in what had once been a garden at the back of the house. Two or three fruit trees were still left in it—black, crooked old things, but still their poor thin old sap was sufficiently stirred by the presence of spring to put out a few white and pink-and-white blossoms, pathetically straggling. A rotten rustic seat and a prostrate dial pillar were the only other signs left to show that the grim, black backyard had ever been green with grass and red with roses. Above its high walls rose higher dead walls. No windows except those of the lifeless house commanded it. It was a quaintly quiet place to find in a neighbourhood so densely populated. The hum of voices and the roll of traffic came to us there softened as if by long distance. The very patch of sky that we could see at the mouth of our shaft of dead walls seemed isolated. And the old man with whom I talked under those old pear and apple trees was as lonely as his dwelling. The only person in the world who loved him was his little granddaughter, and from her he was separated as he thought for life. She was the only child of his only child, and this son had been obliged to flee the country ; having first worried his mother and his wife into their graves, deceived and ruined his father, and deceived and seriously embarrassed his father-in-law. The enraged father-in-law maintained that the father had been in league with his rascally son. When the penniless old man left the country town in which he had lived from boyhood without disgrace—except that which his son's rascality had reflected on him—he was

obliged to leave his little Lily behind him, with the understanding that she was to have no further communication with him. Those were the terms on which the other grandfather took charge of her. The old man came up to London to begin life anew—not hopefully, as the unsophisticated young come, but from the motive that drives the worsted of all ages to London—to hide their distress in a crowd. When the ‘nephew’ of ‘Lockman and Nephew’ was quite a boy, the old man had known him and been kind to him. *He* was the only being in all wide London that the old man—whom we call Mr White—could think of as at all likely to put him in the way of earning the humblest crust in this tragically huge congeries of most commonplace struggles for daily bread. With very faint hope Mr White went to the city office of the firm, and his heart sank within him when he found that the Mr Dingley into whose presence he was ushered was one who had not at first the slightest recollection of him. Mr Dingley, suspecting imposture, asked searching questions, with short City sharpness, but at last, when he had convinced himself that his visitor had known his brother, he suddenly exclaimed, ‘By-the-bye, I do remember hearing John talk sometimes about a Mr White who was very kind to him when he spent his holidays at ——. I’m sorry to say I can do very little for you, Mr White. Your age is against you. You must come into the mill young, if you want to get on in London. But I’ll do what I can. There’s no vacancy in our place, or likely to be, but I’ll make inquiries elsewhere. Mind, you musn’t expect any salary but what it seems like an insult to offer to a man of your years, and

standing once—that son of yours must be a precious scamp. Perhaps you'll let me be your banker for a day or two—and, Mr White—lodging runs away with money in London. Excuse my mentioning it, but we've got a little room or two we don't use in our warehouse down by the river. You're welcome to live there rent-free as long as you like. You'll be of use to us, for I've a notion our foreman often leaves the premises unprotected. Wait a bit, and I'll write a line to the housekeeper. . . . There, I've told her to hunt you up some sticks—there must be plenty stowed away somewhere—as many as you'll want, at any rate. And now, good morning, Mr White. Call again on Thursday—perhaps I may have heard of something for you by that time. Excuse my hurrying you, but time is money in the City. That reminds me—I was to be your banker.' He forced a couple of sovereigns, together with the note, into the old man's hand, and showed him out of the inner office. When Mr White called again on the Thursday, it was to receive a note that Mr Dingley had left for him, introducing him to a situation in another firm. The hours were very long, the work was disagreeable, the pay was very small, for an old man ; but Mr White felt very grateful to Mr Dingley. It is not everybody who will put himself to trouble to aid an old man simply because he was once kind to a dead brother. Past kindnesses which we have received ourselves are disgracefully apt to grow dim in our recollection, when there is no prospect of more to come from the same quarter. The foreman took a faint liking to Mr White as soon as he found the old man was no spy. The 'housekeeper' did all she could to make him com-

fortable, because he was so 'civil-spoken,' so anxious to save trouble, and so ready to give any help he could. She soon discovered that the greatest kindness she could show him was—not to inflict her garrulity upon him. 'Pore old gentleman,' she once said to me, 'it's plain to see that he ~~is~~ a gentleman, an' 'as 'ad 'eavy sorrers. It makes my 'heart bleed to see 'im slavin' as he do. I'd git up willing to git 'is breakfast for 'im, but he 'on't let me. Them dark, bitter winter mornin's, too, an' 'im as 'as been used to a comfortable 'ome, gittin' 'is breakfast at a coffee-stall! An' then back he comes at night, lookin' as tired as tired, but he al'ays tries to give me a cheery word when I lets 'im in. An' then he goes up-stairs to 'ave 'is tea, an' read a book or the paper, an' to smoke 'is pipe; or if it's fine, he smokes it out in the backyard, all alone of 'isself, pore dear; but it's company to me, though he ain't fond o' talk, to know that a nice old gentleman like 'im is on the place, for the foreman don't come 'ome till three or four in the mornin'—horfen.'

I had got to know Mr White through his coming regularly to our church, and as often as I could, which was not very often, I dropped in to have a chat with him in the evening. His loneliness touched me, and the matter-of-course resignation with which he bore his troubles inspired me with sincere respect. He made no martyr of himself—he did not speak about his bowing to the will of God; but it was manifest that he *had* suffered, and that his sufferings had not shaken his trust in God, but rather deepened his love for the divine element incarnated in Christ—the Solacer of the sorrowful, the Saviour of the

sinful. Shallow-hearted people sneer at what they call 'the Gushing' in both life and literature, and unfortunately, in both, 'gushing' is shammed often enough to justify apparently the sneers of those who do not 'gush' for the same reason that a stagnant ditch does not. Natheless, and sharing fully, I hope, the Englishman's *healthy* hatred of 'a scene,' I am not ashamed to confess that I often felt half ready to cry when I heard Mr White talk about his little Lily. She was the only subject on which he ever waxed loquacious. Her precocious demands for definitions definite enough for her scrupulously truth-loving, and delicately though dexterously deceit-detecting, satisfaction; her monkey-tricks; her wondrous old-wife wisdom; the pretty way in which she said her prayers; her general love for all created things—her special affection for the suffering; her more especial love for '*real* grandpapa'—her trying to comfort him when she saw he was in trouble, by trying to make his bed 'all by herself' (getting half smothered in the process): these were topics on which the old man was never weary of dilating. But the maternal grandfather, though he had never seemed to care a pin for her before, had claimed little Lily when '*real* grandpapa' came to grief, and knowing that he could then do nothing for the child, Mr White, for the child's sake, had been obliged to submit with humiliated gratitude to the claim. After he had obtained his poor little employment in London he had several times written to the father of his son's wife, inquiring after little Lily, and expressing his anxious willingness to take her under his own charge, if the

change of guardianship would not injure the child's prospects; but his first letter had come back to him with no answer except its resealing and redirection; and the others had been returned without even being opened. Poor old Mr White, I could see, pined for his granddaughter's presence. He loved her dearly, not only for her own sake, but also because she was all the good that had come to him—and *such* a good—from the reprobate only child of whom he had once been almost as fond. Tom couldn't be utterly bad, or he would never have had such a child as little Lily, the old man thought.

One evening when I called at the old house the housekeeper exclaimed rapturously, 'What do you think, sir?—he's got his little girl! She's sittin' with him in the yard—have a look at 'em before you go out—they're a pictur!' That evening I contented myself with looking at them through the hall window; they looked so happy in their re-union that I thought it would be cruel to intrude my company on them. They were sitting under one of the black old apple trees, then sprinkled with green and pink-and-white; and the golden-haired little girl was pouring out the grey-haired old man's tea for him as gravely as if she had been his own age, whilst he still held one of her hands, as if he must touch her to make sure that he was not dreaming. 'Yesterday mornin',' said the housekeeper, 'Sergeant Rogers come in with her. "Does a Mr White live here?" he axes. "Yes," says the foreman, "but he 'on't be in till night." "Well," says the sergeant, "this little girl says he's her gran'-father, an' so I've brought her." An' where do you think

he'd found her, sir? He'd looked in the night afore to see what was up at Mother Clam's—that's a lodgin'-ouse in Tar Barrel Court—an' there with all them dirty drabs o' women squabblin' round her was Miss Lily sayin' her little prayers afore she went to bed. So, when she got up, he axes her what she was doin' there, an' she says that one o' the women had promised to take her to her gran'father. "Who's he, an' where does he live?" axes the sergeant. So she shows him a bit of paper, with "Mr White, Messrs Lockman and Nephew's, — Lane, — Street," wrote on it. So he takes her to the station-ouse for the night, an' then he brings her here. I 'ad her down in the kitchen till the old gentleman come 'ome, an' tidied her up a bit—for she'd walked the shoes off her feet. All the way from — that pore little dear had walked. As well as I can make out, she was livin' with another grand-father as didn't like this one as she calls her *real* gran'-father, an' wouldn't tell her nothing about him. An' they was cross to her there all kind o' ways, all excep' a little cousin of hers, an' him she got to write down what was wrote on that there bit o' paper, an' up she comes to London with it, sleepin' in barns an' on haystacks, an' that like. Somewheres about Bow, as well as I can make out, she fell in with the woman that took her to Mother Clam's, an' who knows what might ha' come of her if the sergeant hadn't come across her? You should ha' seen the to-do there was when the old gentleman come 'ome last night. She run out with me when he rung, an' up she jumped, an' hugged him as if she was goin' to throttle him, an' he downwright cried for joy, an' I cried too.

Out I had to go at once to buy her some new clothes. I do hope there's no lor to take her from him. She's cheered him up wonderful, an' she'll be such company for me all day. It's astonishing what wisdom that child has, an' yet she's full o' fun an' as fond as fond can be. It's awful, though, to see how good she is. "Weren't you afraid, my pretty dear," says I, "to sleep out all alone by yourself like that?" "No, nurse," says she—that's the name she's give me—"no, nurse," she says, "I said my prayers, an' it was nice when I woke in the night to see the stars up above—just like angels watching over me."

XVII.

A BLIND COUPLE AND THEIR YOUNG FRIENDS.

LUTHER'S Hymn is a noble tune, but when played quaveringly on a fife, it neither soothes one's feelings nor stimulates sluggish thought. I heard it one Saturday morning so played, when I was in want of both such sedative and such spur. I had a sermon to write, and was not in sermon-writing trim. After choosing and rejecting some dozen texts, I had at last selected one which seemed suggestive; but when I had written it down, it, too, suggested nothing. It was easy to write a few lines of general introduction that would have done for almost any sermon, but when those were finished, I was once more at a standstill. For some twenty minutes I had been dabbing my pen into the ink-stand, as if sentences could be speared like salmon, and feverishly fluttering the virgin pages of my paper, when a shrill fife tremulously struck up the tune I have mentioned, directly under my window. It jarred so on my nerves—

more especially because it reminded me of the pulpit for which I was half-hopelessly striving to prepare—that, I am ashamed to say, I lost my temper. I tossed my paper into a drawer, put up my Bible, Prayer-book, and Concordance, and went to the window to intimate to the quavering minstrel that he must move on—although, as I had made up my mind to use an old sermon on the morrow, I had no longer a good excuse for doing so. I felt *very* much ashamed of myself when I found who the minstrel was. ‘He saw a man which was blind from his birth’ was the last text I had chosen, and the fife-player was a white-haired blind man. He stood shivering in the muddy roadway, stopping the holes of his fife with fingers so swollen, blue, and numb from cold that it was no wonder his music was made up of ‘shakes.’ His dog shook, too, as he sat on his haunches on the pavement, with a battered decanter-slide in his black, bluff muzzle, and a half-ludicrous wheedling look in his honest round eyes. When I raised the window, the dog stood up on all fours, and wagged his stump of a tail in anticipation of a contribution to his tray. Before I could drop the coin, however, a tumult arose in a side street, and as the noise came nearer every moment, the dog strained at his cord until his eyes seemed starting from his head, in order to drag his master on to the footpath; but before he could do so a runaway horse dashed round the corner, and knocked the old man down. He had been picked up by the time I got into the street, but he was quite stunned. We carried him into the nearest chemist’s shop, where he was restored to sensibility, but as his arm was

broken, the druggist advised that he should be at once taken to the hospital. Of course, by that time a crowd had gathered in front of the shop, flattening their faces against the window-panes, and trying to force open the bolted door. Accidents have a curious fascination for the lower orders of Londoners. No doubt they pity the sufferers, but still they seem to delight in witnessing their sufferings, and to be very proud if they can do anything that brings them *en rapport* at first-hand with the mishap. As soon as it was known outside that we wanted a cab, a rush was made to the nearest cab-stand, and in a few minutes four cabs came galloping up—their excited callers sitting and pointing with great importance on the box-seats. Those on the three that did not get the fare had to descend with undignified precipitancy before the drivers' abuse. We put the poor old man into the first that pulled up, his dog leaped in after him, and I went as third passenger to the London Hospital. All the time we were in the shop, the poor dog had been sadly perplexed. He seemed partly persuaded that those who were handling his old master meant kindly, but still he could not make quite sure. Now he would drop his tray, and whine, and try to push his nose into his master's hand; and then again he would give a low growl, snatch up his tray, and plant himself, with firmly-set bandy legs and a menacing wrinkle on his nose, before the chair in which the old man drooped, as if he wished to let us know that, whilst he had a tooth left, no one should take liberties with his master's person or property. On the way to the hospital he snuggled by his master's side, licking his face and

hands, and every now and then giving a literal whimper of sympathy when the old man gave a groan at a worse jolt than usual. The dog eyed me suspiciously when I took my place on the opposite seat, but as soon as he found from his master's tone that my intentions were good, his severe look relaxed, and he apologized for it by giving a wag or two of his brief tail in the rare moments in which his concern for his master would allow him to notice my presence. 'I suppose they won't take in my dog as well as me, sir,' the old man said. 'He's been a good friend to me this seven year, has Billy—the best dog I ever had, and they've all been good. "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" the man in the Bible says; but if he'd *been* a dog, he wouldn't never ha' done it. There ain't many men nor women neither can come near dogs for faithfulness.' Another jolt, and groan, and whimper.

'All right, old chap,' the old man went on, patting his dog with his undisaabled hand; 'you shall go home and keep the missis company. She'd be lonesomer than ever without you, poor old girl. My poor wife is dark, like myself, sir. She goes out most days to earn what she can, but she's at home to-day, laid up with the infleēnzy. If I might make so bold, sir, I should take it kindly if you'd give her a call, and tell her where I am, and that I hope to be out again soon, please God. And here's seven-pence-halfpenny I've took this morning—she'll want it. Stevens—Henry Stevens—is my name, and we live in Cook's Alley. You go along the Back Road till you come to Well Street, and then you turn—but bless ye, Billy will

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take you. Now you pay attention, Billy. You're to go home presently with this gentleman—to the missis—do you mind? And you behave yourself like a good dog, Billy.'

Billy thumped a tail-tattoo on the cab-cushion and glanced patronizingly across at me as much as to say, 'You needn't be afraid—I'll take care of you, because master bids me.'

'You won't want the string, sir,' the old man added, as he slipped off the dog's collar, 'and it will be cheery like to have something as belonged to poor old Billy when I'm shut in yonder. Now mind you don't go moping, Billy, because of the missis; and you take this gentleman the nearest way you know. Don't you stop at the Chequers, Billy—I'm not a drinkin' man, sir, I thank God, but sometimes I look in there to get a rest and half a pint, and if I hadn't told the dog, you see, sir, he might have wanted *you* to go in, and that's what a clergyman wouldn't like, I know.'

I was going to ask the old man how he knew that I was a clergyman, but just then the cab gave a lurch that made him clench his teeth in agony, and Billy, forgetting that my character had been vouched for, bared his at me in very ferocious fashion. Soon afterwards we reached the admirable institution which provides for the poorest of London's poor medical and surgical skill equal to what the richest can command, and liberal treatment which is at least on a level with that of any hospital anywhere. When I had handed over the old man to the hospital's care, and promised to execute his commissions, and come to see him as soon as possible, I started for Cook's

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Alley under the pilotage of Billy, who had lavished canine kisses with nose and tongue on his master at parting. The dog did really take me the nearest route: turning down beside the hospital in a straight line into the Commercial Road, and then, almost in a straight line, into the Back Road. Every minute or two he looked back to see if I was following, and then when he found I was, trotted gravely on as before. If I had not followed him, I am inclined to think that he would have taken me into custody. When we reached Cook's Alley, after threading a maze of inosculating courts and lanes, Billy's arrival without his master caused much wonderment amongst the local loungers. But Billy took no notice of them. He merely threw back one more glance at me, and then trotted on to the foot of, and up, a staircase at the bottom of the alley: the loungers following to the landing on which Billy halted, to discover 'what was up.'

They were so dirty and ragged, and the common staircase was so filthy, that I was quite startled when the door at which Billy scratched and whined was opened. The old blind woman who opened it looked, in spite of her indisposition, 'as neat as a new pin;' both floor and ceiling were clean; the walls were papered with cheap woodcuts; a few flower-pots stood on the window-seat; the window-panes were transparent; the hearth was swept up; there were two or three china ornaments and a little looking-glass on the mantel-shelf; and the furniture, crockery, cooking utensils, &c., although scanty, were all free from dust, and rubbed, washed, and scoured up to look their best and brightest.

When I had told my tidings, and allayed the old woman's anxiety to the best of my ability, I could not help expressing my astonishment at the neatness of her room.

'Oh, sir,' she said, 'if we can't see dirt, we can feel it. I hate a muddle, and it's a okypation to keep things nice about one. P'raps there's a bit of pride in it. Seeing folks, they say, have their places sometimes in a rare mess. But then again, I like to keep my place tidy, though I can't see it, that them as can may take pleasure in it when they drop in. So p'raps there ain't much harm in being proud of it after all—and my poor husband's just like myself, he can't abear dirt indoors—nor you nayther, can ye, Billy?'

Stevens, I found, had been born blind, but the wife had lost her sight when about twenty, from an attack of small-pox. 'I was a gay, giddy girl, sir,' she said, 'very vain of my looks and my eyes, and when I came to myself, and couldn't see, and knew I was an object, I almost wished at first that I'd never got better. It didn't seem better to be like that. I was engaged to be married to a young man, but he never came near me while I was ill, and broke it all off as soon as I got about again. That cut me up dreadful at the time. I felt so lonely, for father and mother had both died of the small-pox, and there didn't seem a soul in the world that cared a penny-piece what became of me. I'm thankful now, though, it all happened as it did, for it was being left like that made me think about religion, and if I'd been a seeing woman I should have married a seeing man, and

he wouldn't have been the husband to me that Stevens have been. He *is* a good man, sir, though I say it as shouldn't. He was brought up at an institution, and of an evening he reads the Bible to me. There's one good thing in being blind—you can read without a candle. Yes, sir, we've been very happy, and I pray God He'll spare my poor husband to me. He's the only one in the wide world that belongs to me like.'

'Had you ever any children?'

'One, sir, we had, the year after we were married, but God took her when she was three year old. I didn't want the neighbours to tell me that she was a sweet pretty child—you'd only to run your hand over her face, and feel the dimples, to know that. Oh, yes, sir, *she* could see, and beautiful eyes she had, and long curls as soft as silk. I can't tell you, sir, how proud I was of my pretty pet. Seemed as if God had given her to me to make up for making such a fright of me. And we were both so fond of her, and she was so fond of us. She was fond of everybody, pretty dear, and everybody was fond of her. Why, sir, the dog—no, it was long before Billy's time—jumped up on her bed when he heard the doctor say there was no hope for her, and she died cuddling of him, pretty dear. It did seem hard to have her took away from us that had got so little, and I was wicked enough to say so. But my husband says to me, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord,"—and yet Stevens was just as much cut up as me, only in a quieter sort of way. Ah, she *was* a miss. It was months before we got used like

to her being away. She was always so full of fun, nobody could be dull where she was. The dog got mopish without her to play with, and my old man would sit as still as a mouse in the evening. She used to go and kneel down by him, you see, when I'd put on her little night-gown, and say her little prayers. She could say them right through without anybody telling of her, though she couldn't speak plain. If she'd lived, she'd be getting an old woman now, but it seems as if 'twas only yesterday I heard her saying,

“Dentle Desus, meek an' mile,
Dook upon a 'tittle chile.”

She'll always seem a little girl to me till I see her a growed-up angel, if God will be so good as to let me. It's strange how I long to *see* her. Now my husband's different. He never knew what sight was, and so he can't understand my feelings about that. To have hold of her, and hear her talk, seemed enough for him, but I was always wondering exactly what she was like. I'd got my notion of her, but I couldn't be sure it was right, and so I felt robbed like—not to know my own child's face for certain. I wonder sometimes which is hardest, not to know how things look, like my poor husband; or to remember how they used to look, like me.'

I encouraged the poor woman to talk, to divert her thoughts as much as possible from her husband's accident. When first told of it, she had wanted to start off at once to go to him. 'Poor dear,' she had said, 'lying there all alone of himself. Billy will take me, and I'd leave him

if they'd promise to give him something to eat. Billy would be a comfort to my poor old man. It's astonishing what a kind heart that dog has—he'd see his master wasn't put upon.'

I persuaded the good woman, however, both for her own sake and her husband's, to wait until the next 'visiting day' before she went to the hospital. When we had been talking for some time, she suddenly exclaimed, 'It seems cruel to be sitting here doing nothing, and him lying yonder. If I mayn't go, will you say a prayer for him, sir?' She sobbed out her amens, but when we rose from our knees she seemed to be comforted. 'Thankee, sir,' she said. 'We've asked God to take care of him, and we can't do better than that, can we, Billy?' She spoke, habitually, to the dog just as if he were 'the Christian' she called him. Billy in response leaped into her lap. 'Now, isn't that strange?' said the old woman. 'He'll never do that when Stevens is at home, but he wants to say he's pleased, and 'll do all he can to cheer me up.'

We had some more chat, in the course of which I learnt the history of this blind couple. The parish on which she was left chargeable started the blind girl as a seller of tape, pins, boot and stay laces, and other such 'small wares.' At best the living she thus got was next door to starvation, and her state of health often threw her back again upon the parish's care. A guardian interested himself to procure her one of the few-shillings pensions that are given to the blind by benevolent persons in London, and at the house of her benefactress, the

Countess of C——, the blind girl made the acquaintance of Stevens, a fellow-pensioner. He had been taught basket-making at the institution in which he had been trained, and then was in pretty regular employ. The two married, and had and lost their little pet. The wife did her best to supplement her husband's wages with 'small-ware' earnings, but had been so often ill that, as she phrased it, 'any other man but Stevens would have got rid of me long ago ; instead of a help, I'm a hindrance.' 'He could soon have got another,' she went on. 'A blind man can take his pick of wives, if he'll only beg. There's blind folk, I know, that could be cured if they would, but they won't, because they can make more without their eyes than with them. But my husband was never one of that sort. As long as he could get work at the basket-making he did it, but that's no trade for a blind man now. He can't work against them that have got their eyes, especially when he's getting a bit old and stiff. So Stevens took to playing in the street, but that ain't begging, sir. He gives good music for the money he gets. He won't so much as say, 'Please to pity the poor blind,' or have it wrote on a card, as a many do. He's a man of a very independent spirit, is my husband, and yet there's few that thinks so little of themselves. It'll be dreary to-morrow without him, won't it, Billy? We always go to church twice on Sundays, sir, and Billy goes with us and lies under the seat as good as gold. And then when we come home, it's nice to be able to be together and sit still, instead of tramping about. And Stevens reads the Testa-

ment to me, and we sing a hymn or two before we go to bed. Sometimes there's drunken folks that make game on us, but mostly the neighbours stop it. There's few that ain't kind to blind people. An' some o' them as ain't got much to bless themselves with can cheer up old folks like us just by their company-like. There's the four orphans as live in the Alley. They comes in now and then an' has a cup o' tea, an' it's nice to hear 'em. They're all so fond o' one another. Sunday's always been the best day of the week to me ever since we married. Sitting at home, or sitting in church, heaven seems nearer somehow than it do of a week-day, and it's nice to have my old man with me all day long. I shall feel lost to-morrow without him.'

'You seem very fond of your husband.'

'I *ought* to be, sir. A kinder soul don't breathe. Many a time he's gone without that I mightn't, and nursed me when I was ill just as if he was my mother. And he's as good as a minister to me. It isn't much that he says, but he says it so gentle, and then he behaves according. It was him that first taught me really to believe in my Saviour. I took a religious turn when I lost my sight—most blind folk have a liking that way—but it wasn't till I knew Stevens that I got to understand what religion was. That's enough to make me fond o' him—let alone his being so kind, and my little girl's father.'

I became much interested in the four little orphans to whom Mrs Stevens had referred, and I shall have some-

thing to say of them again ; but I may here state what I then gathered of their history from her, and a day or two afterwards from the eldest of them.

This eldest, Phoebe, was not fourteen, but she was quite a mother to her sisters, Harriet and Emma, of eleven and ten, and her little brother, Dick, of nine. They lodged together in a room tenanted by an old woman who kept a 'refuse' fruit-stall in a neighbouring street. Disfigured as her fruit generally was, its colours contrasted queerly with the dusky gloom of the dark cramped attic in which surplus stock was garnered at night, and when the children brought home unsold posies, the bound, faded flowers seemed to be consciously-pining captives.

Phoebe was a very grave little maiden. Her responsibilities seemed to have crushed all girlish glee out of her. She talked as if she had been past forty, instead of not fourteen. This was the account she gave me, when I wanted to get an idea of the little lonely family's daily life :—' Well, sir, I wakes the children in the mornin', and it's hard work sometimes, when they've been walkin' a good bit the day afore, poor little things. And we says our prayers, and goes to Common Garding. It's mostly flowers we sticks to, but we'll work other things when we can git the chance. That's a good step from here, and horfen we're 'ungry by the time we gits there. There's cawfee and bread and butter you can git, but if you can't git it, why it makes you feel the 'ungrier. No, sir, I can't say that the fruit and the vegetables ever made me feel 'ungry—you want somethin' warmin'er when you turn out o' your bed at daylight. But it *is* astonishin' who can eat

all that lot—wan-loads and wan-loads of 'm—the streets round about is choked with 'em, and the cabbages is piled up like 'ouses. When the rubub's in, you can smell it ever so far off, and there's the water runnin' about on the leaves like sixpences. *Pretty?* I hain't much time to think of what's pretty, sir. I've got to think of what'll pay best. Yes, sir, sometimes I give the little uns a bit of a feed afore I starts 'em, but that's accordin' to what I've got for stock-money. I buy whatever's in. Wi'lets comes in twice a year. Sometimes 'tis wi'lets, and sometimes 'tis primroses, and sometimes 'tis roses, and sometimes 'tis wall-flowers, and stocks, and pansies, and minni-net, and lilies o' the walley—some o' the young City gents as fancies theirselves swells are wery fond o' stickin' the lily o' the walley in their button-'oles. And sometimes it's green lavender. We sells dry lavender too, but that's in the winter when we can't git nothin' else. Fresh things we buys for a penny a bunch at the market, and then we splits 'em up inter two or three, and sells 'em at a penny, or a 'a'penny, accordin' to chances, and sometimes we has to bring 'em 'ome for nothin'. I does my best to freshen 'em up, but they look drunk-like in the mornin'. When we're ready, we start—sometimes this way, sometimes t'other—as far apart as we can. We takes our rounds turn and turn about. Miles we walk—hup 'Averstock 'Ill, and about the swell streets in the West-end, and hout to Clapton, and so on, sometimes. No, we never goes across the bridges—I don't know nothin' about them parts. Sometimes we does tidyish in the City, round about by the Bank and the 'Change. But I don't mean 'arriet shall

go there when she gits a bit older. She's a pretty little gal, and she knows it, and some o' the gals there is a bad lot. I was on the pavement in front o' the Change one Saturday arternoon, and I see a gal that was sellin' flowers there three weeks afore, with scarce a shoe to her foot, come along with a velvet bonnet and a silk cloak on; and 'arriet's fond of dressin' 'erself up. She'll put roses in 'er 'air, when we're a-tyin' 'em up, and I've seed 'er stop at a water-trough to look at her face in it. But she shan't git fine things *that* way—not if I knows it. Mother would be fit to jump out of 'eaven, if she did. Yes, sir, there's bad amongst flower-gals, but there's good too, and it's 'ard that those as tries to behave theirselves should git a bad name becos o' what the t'others does. It's 'ard work havin' to look arter children. Hemmer's a trouble to me, too, but that's only becos she's so weakly. A quieter, willin'er little gal never was. But Dick's a trial, like 'arriet. He ain't a bad-meanin' little chap, but big boys gits 'old on 'im, and I'm afeared they'll teach 'im wrong. He's wery owdacious. Last winter he went out Christmasin' with some big chaps. They put him up to git a great bough of mistletoe off a tree in an old gen'leman's horchard down by Chingford. But out come the old gen'leman and collared 'im, and away the t'other chaps cut. The old gen'leman was in a hawful rage, for he'd 'ad all his 'ollytrees spiled the night afore. So he up with 'is stick, and was jest agoin' to hide Dick, when he stopped all of a sudding. "No," says he, "it ain't your fault, you shrimp. I wish I could ketch them cowardly mates o' yourn." And he give Dick a penny, but he didn't let 'im take the mistletoe. I wish I

could git Dick larnt a trade. He'll go wrong, I'm afeared, if he keeps in the streets—and so 'll 'Arriet. They both minds me now, but when they git to my age, they won't be so teachable. They're a trouble to me, sir—both on 'em. Night and mornin' I prays for 'em, for they're dear, kind children, though they is so flighty. When little Hemmer's bad, they'll work twice as 'ard as they will other times. And it ain't jest for their own bellies—becos there's Hemmer's takin's to make up. It's becos they want to give 'er a bit of a treat; and they'll be so quiet when they come 'ome, it's strange to see 'em—'specially Dick. He's uncommon fond o' Hemmer, and so's Hemmer of 'im. I wish they could be shook up together. Dick 'ud be all the better of her willin'ness, and she'd be all the better of a bit of his sperrit. And yet, though she is so quiet, she takes, mostly, more than any on us. "Pore little thing," a good many people says when they sees her. If all as says it was to buy of her, Hemmer would soon be sold out; but it's heasier to pity a party than to 'elp 'em—not that I'm a-complainin'. All taings considered, we do uncommon well, thank God.'

The blind man lay in hospital a weary while. The fracture was a serious one, and when the arm was getting better, an almost total prostration of strength supervened. A more patient sufferer I never saw. His only anxiety seemed to be about his wife and Billy. A friend to whom I had mentioned the case agreed to make the old woman a little allowance until her husband should be able to get about again. When I told him of this, his

face flushed. 'I'm ashamed of myself,' he said. 'After all that God's done for me, I was beginning to doubt Him. I was worrying myself to think that Charlotte would have to go into the house, and that would have been the death of her, poor old girl. We've always managed to keep off the parish somehow, and she'd break her heart if she couldn't come to me when the doctors allows it. I ought to have known better. There's the Lamentation the blind folks that go out begging sing. I don't like a man begging when he can do something for his living, just because he's blind ; but there's some pretty poetry in the Lamentation, sir. I've often said these lines out of it to myself—

" But since it is God's will,
The more I cannot see the day,
He'll be my comfort still ! "

And I'll go on saying 'em, for He *is* a comfort every way. When I first come to the hospital, I used to have bad dreams, but now they're so nice it's a treat to go to sleep—and what's that but God's goodness? Why it was only last night I dreamt that my little girl, that's dead and buried years ago, came and sat on my knee, and put her hands round my neck, just as she used to do, and then there was sweet voices all round me like birds singing, but what they sung was all my favourite verses out of the Psalms and the Testament. And now you've come and brought me this good news, and Charlotte and Billy will be here directly, and I shall be able to enjoy their com-

pany. I shan't feel as if I was starving them, lying here doing nothing.'

Charlotte and Billy were very regular visitors at the hospital. Billy at first was refused admission, but interest was made for him, and Billy was allowed to patter up the long ward at the end of which his master lay. As soon as he reached his master's bed, Billy would leap upon it, lick the sick man's face, and then, as if conscious that he was on his good behaviour, sit quite still, wistfully watching his master, but ready to jump down the moment his mistress rose to say good-bye. It was not much that the old people said to one another, but they found a comfort in being together, hand in hand. Just before she took her departure, Charlotte generally brought out some little thing she had managed to buy for her 'old man;' not venturing to produce it sooner, because he had forbidden her to stint herself to get things for him, when he had everything he wanted, and this was the one command of his which she was obstinately determined not to obey.

At last, however, Charlotte and Billy came to the hospital on a more cheerful mission. The old man was discharged, and they had come to convoy him home. Billy, generally a very grave dog, leaped and circled and whined for joy like a young puppy, until, suddenly remembering his responsibilities, he trotted up to his master to have his collar put on again.

The old people did not belong to my parish, but they came to my church the first Sunday after the old man's discharge. They knelt in the aisle just under me—Billy's

bullet-head peeping between his master's feet—when I read out, 'An old man and his wife desire to return thanks to Almighty God for His great goodness unto them.' And in their case the formula was no empty form : they meant the thanks they offered.

XVIII.

HUGGING RAGS.



STREET-TRADING is not the mode of industry I should select for a London child compelled to earn its own living—if only (a mocking condition in hundreds of cases) it could find anything better to do. Street-life is not civilizing. Those bred to it can rarely settle down, when they can get the chance, to what persons accustomed to home and within-walls labour would think far more comfortable callings. Sometimes they become vagabonds in the moral sense, and they are almost sure to become vagabonds in the etymological sense. They like to be free to rove or rest according to their pleasure. They prefer ‘chancy’ profits to fixed wages; if to-day’s take is bad, they comfort themselves with the thought of ‘better luck to-morrow.’ Permanent shelter, associated with confinement, makes them feel, in their own phrase, ‘choked like.’ In spite of these nomadic tendencies however, laziness

is not a charge which can be brought against the street-sellers of London. The miles they walk, the hours they stand, the shouts they utter, and often the heavy weights they push or pull or carry, make such an accusation ridiculous. The vast majority of London street-sellers work hard enough for their living, and feel a pride in being beholden to nobody for their keep. Their honesty is not always unimpeachable, but many of them are strictly honest; and when we remember the very high places of British commerce that are defiled by dirty tricks of trade, we should be chary of casting pharisaic stones at those of the uninstructed, sorely-tempted street-sellers who do try to defraud their customers.

It is our tramp class, whom we too often encourage by miscalled 'charity,' because we like to buy a little reputation for benevolence, from ourselves or others, cheap; because we are too indolent to make inquiries; or because we want to get rid of the bore of having a disagreeable-looking, brimstone-scented object running beside us on the pavement, or whining or bullying at our doors—it is our tramps who, *par excellence* (or the lack of it), form the lazily-dishonest species of the awfully large body slumped under the generic head of the London Poor. A professional thief seems almost respectable in comparison with a tramp. The trained thief has a theory that *alienum* is rightfully *suum*, and, to carry his theory into practice, he will expose himself to risk, and sometimes work very hard. The tramp's theory of the universe, on the other hand, is this—that he is to be fed and housed without any trouble to himself. He is ready to steal and

riot, when he can do so without much danger ; for ' a lark ' he will even risk his neck ; but, as a rule, he thinks that the less he does the more society is bound to support him. Sometimes he will not even take the trouble to beg. I have seen tattered tramps lounging in Regent Street, on a fine day, with as self-possessed an air as any ' swell ' upon the pavement. They had slept the night before in a casual ward ; another casual ward was waiting for them ; they had managed somehow to get a dinner ; and so they were amusing themselves by ' looking at the shops. ' A poor man who genuinely shrinks from observation because of his tatteredness is one of the most pity-moving sights that can be seen, but this lazy contentment with rags is loathsomely fearful to behold. It is a pungent satire on the philosophy and religion which make a merit of a man's learning to live on as little as he can—although, when they have the opportunity of gratifying them, tramps are by no means ascetics in any of their appetites.

And yet, despicable as the dirty tramp may seem, sluggishly feeding on society like parasitic vermin, his is a state into which it is far easier for a once self-respecting man to sink and subside than those disposed to despise him might like to believe possible. As a contrast to some of these lives I have recorded, I will give the history of such a man. I fell in with him at the Refuge, and got him to talk pretty freely with me. Now and then he gave a professionally sanctimonious whine, in the hope of propitiating me ; when he spoke of the time when he was in work, he did seem to feel a momentary touch of

shame ; but a chuckle over his adroitness in making other people provide for him ran through the greater part of his narrative. He could read and write, and, though he interlarded his talk with the 'cadger's cant' he had picked up not only in London, but all over England, he otherwise spoke pretty correctly. His clothing was wretched, and he was very dirty ; but there was no trace of famine in his fleshy face and form. He would not give me his real name. 'Figs' was the name, he said, he went by—*why*, he could not, or would not, tell. He had been apprenticed to a carpenter in Maidstone, and, for a year or two after the expiration of his apprenticeship, had earned good wages as a journeyman. 'I used to go to All Saints' of a Sunday—it's a fine old church, and I used to like to see the soldiers of a morning. They've cavalry soldiers of all sorts at the barracks, big and little, red and blue ; and they used to make a pretty sight marching in and out, and clanking their spurs and their sabres when they got up and down at prayers. I was always fond of variety. Sometimes I'd go in the afternoon. There's a travellers' house on the left-hand side as you come up from the bridge. When I've seen the tramps and the hoppers hanging about there of a Sunday afternoon, and the church-going folks looking at them half frightened, I little thought I should ever be one of them ; but I've had some jolly larks in that house since.'

Work became slack in Maidstone, and after spending almost all his savings in search of it in his native town, the carpenter started on foot for London. 'Leastways I footed it to Gravesend, meaning to take the boat there.

I'd got a bundle of my clothes, and my tool basket, and a shilling or two. When I was going up Bluebell Hill, close by Kit's Coty House, that, no doubt, you've heard of, sir, I felt very down-hearted. You can see Aylesford from the hill, and there was a girl there that I was sweet upon—but that wasn't to be. A good thing for her, and for me too, I think, now. And yet if I'd got work when I came to London, I might have been different. I tried my best, so I'm not to blame, sir. I went to every carpenters' house of call I could hear of, but it was no good. No, sir, I didn't drink then, and it isn't much that I take now. I may break out now and then, but I ain't a lushington, praise the Lord. I don't see the sense of it—it ain't seeing life when you've got three parts stupid before the fun begins. Anyhow, I got rid of my clothes, and then I got rid of my tools—and *then* what was I to do?

When he had just money enough left to pay for a bed, he went into a lodging-house in Keate Street, or Thrawl Street—I forget which—and there he matriculated in mendicancy. 'I'm used to such places now, and so long as you're warm and got your grub, where's the sense of making a fuss about a bit of dirt? But I was different then. I'd been used to having things decent about me till I came to London; and the place smelt so bad, and there was such goings on at night, that I wished myself out of it. I was getting a warm at the fire in the morning, and wondering what I was to do for a breakfast, when a chap came up to fill his pot, and says he, "What's your lay?" I didn't know what he meant, and, of course, he could see

that I was green. "Come along," says he, "and have a feed—me and my pals will stand it, though you do look as if you'd got a good twist of your own."

The invitation to breakfast was accepted, and before it was over the carpenter found himself enlisted by a band of 'lurkers'—sham workmen out of work. He *was* one, and looked the character they personated so tellingly that they eagerly availed themselves of his want to snap him up as the show member of their company. 'I was shame-faced at first, sir—I didn't like the thought of begging—but what was I to do? I wasn't going to starve, if I knew it; and when I found how the money came tumbling in, I began to think that folks must be flats to work when they could get a deal more by not working. Ain't it reasonable, sir, for a poor man to think like that? He may work all day, and only get as much in a week as a swell will spend in a minute. It's only fair that the swells should give some of their tin to us, instead of spending it all on their greedy selves. And if they won't give it without asking, it's only doing them a kindness to ask 'em. If your story ain't true exactly of yourself, it's true of somebody they ought to give to, but they wouldn't.'

'Figs,' like a great many other people who have no genuine fear and love of God, had previously been kept honest simply because those with whom he mingled thought it 'respectable' to be honest. Mixed up with another set who thought it 'spoony' to be honest, he rapidly adopted their views. 'I've seen a deal of life, sir—that I have, *in fact*. There ain't many so fly to a good bit of all sorts as folks in my line. Bless you, we

read the papers, and it makes us laugh, it does, when they pity our ignorance. We could put the editors up to a wrinkle or two, I guess. I should like to get one of them into a padding-ken, without a bobby to look after him. He'd be as helpless as a child—indeed, there's plenty of children that know a deal more of what real life is than editors. And the bobbies ain't half so knowing as the papers make them out to be. I could show them up, if I chose; but, of course, it wouldn't pay. A deal of life I've seen, and a deal more I've shammed to see. I've been all sorts of trades, and blown-up stokers, and ship-wrecked mariners, with a picture of the wreck, and full particulars for them that cared to ask for 'em, and some will, but mostly it's old women it's easy to gammon. Most of my limbs I've lost down coalpits and elsewhere. I've been a wounded soldier discharged without a pension, and appealing to an indignant, sympathizing country to right its stingy, ungrateful government's wrong. And I've been a shivery-shaky, the man who couldn't get warm, as the song says; but I never took much to that, because you see, sir, it *must* be pretty cold when you go out to shiver. I've been all sorts of things, and have cultivated the compassion of my countrymen extensively. Where's the harm? Ain't that what you parsons try to do, sir? You should get *me* to preach a charity sermon for you—just as I am.'

The cynical candour of the man's confessions astounded me, but he explained their candour with equal cynicism. 'Why, you see, sir, I soon found out that I couldn't bleed *you*. You haven't much blood to lose, I guess, and though

you don't know half as much about such as me as you fancy, at any rate, you have got to know us when you see us, and you've learnt at last not to trust us—and so I thought, just to take a rise out of you, I'd make you open your eyes with a bit of Gospel truth. You'll excuse my saying it, I hope, but you've a soft look, and I don't think you'd have the heart to turn me out of here to-night, even if you'd got the power, which, I believe, you haven't, so long as I obey regulations and don't make a row; and, power or no power, you'd have to send for the police—and that wouldn't look pretty in the papers, would it, sir?—there'd be leaders about the homeless wanderer kicked out by the folks that call themselves charitable—lamentable to state, at the instigation of a clergyman—into the bitter inclemency of the wintry elements. I shan't trouble you after to-night, sir. Your accommodation ain't to my taste, nor your grub either, and I was fool enough to think I'd get a good feed, and so I didn't bring anything in. You've *done* me, sir. I owe you one, I own.'

I suppose I ought to be ashamed to say so, but I could scarcely suppress a smile at the fellow's impudent outspokenness. Of course, he instantly noticed the twitching of my lips, and went on in high good-humour:— 'You're not bad in London. Where there's such a sight of folks there must be a sight of flats. But the yokels are better. If you can't butter 'em, you can bounce 'em. The farmers, big as they are, are very timorous. They'll give a cadger, if he's only a bit cheeky, and the farm's a bit lonely, a tanner, and sometimes a bob, to get him to

move on when the day's drawing in; and *how* they'll watch you down the lanes—shamming not to, all the while! They're afraid their ricks will be fired, or their throats cut at night. I've slept in many a barn, for all their looking-out. It's a good game to go up to the back door of a farm-house, when all the men folk are out. The maids look as if they'd drop through the floor when you poke your head in, and "However did he get past the dog?" you'll hear the mistress say; but we know a trick or two besides that. And then the *scran* you get in the country—not round near London, but when you go north'ard. It ain't dry crusts and cold fat, such as they give away in London, and think themselves very charitable for getting rid of what they can't eat; but real good stuff that it's a pleasure to eat—ham, and pies, and such like—and what you can't eat you can sell with a good conscience at the ken. And rare larks you can have at some of them country kens. Quiet little places they may be in—you'd think three parts of the folks went to bed as soon as they'd had their supper, and then lay trembling for fear the country beaks should wake 'em up to say they've some fault to find with them; but we've nice games, notwithstanding, in them quiet little cribs with "Accommodation for Travellers" up over them, as steady-looking as if the travellers were Methody travelling preachers.'

To make the man feel ashamed of himself, I asked him how he had felt the first time he visited Maidstone as a beggar. 'Well, sir, I won't deny that I felt *queer*—afraid like, somehow, that I should meet myself—what used to

be myself, I mean—but I can't explain silly nonsense. Of course, I met lots of people I knew, but they didn't know me, and if they had, they wouldn't have been likely to claim my acquaintance. A cadger is better off than a king—if he wants to travel incog., *he* can. But it *did* make me uncomfortable that first time I was in Maidstone. I saw the house where I was born, and the school I went to, and the shop I worked at, and the woman's where I lodged, and they all looked so decent, that I half wished I'd never gone away. But this was the cuttingest thing—at the houses we use, they mostly put you up to the best walks to take in turn. Well, the day after I got to Maidstone, I was up pretty early. We mostly are. We ain't early to bed, but we're early to rise, and that's what makes us so healthy, wealthy, and wise. Well, when I got to Allington, I thought I'd sit down on the grass by the old castle, and have a pipe there before I went to business. Who do you think came by, sir, whilst I was sitting there? The very girl I courted at Aylesford. I knew her, but she didn't know me. When I was going to speak to her, back she ran, screeching "John, John," and up came her husband, a big quarryman, looking as black as thunder. I'd half a mind to tell him I knew his wife before he did, but then there's no use in making mischief when you can't get anything out of it; and so I said, as mild as milk, "I'm sorry I frightened the lady—I was only going to ask her for a copper to help a poor traveller, that's been sleeping under a hayrick, to a breakfast." And she gave me a penny with her own hand, and look'd right at me, sir, and yet she didn't know me—

so, you see, sir, she hadn't broken her heart about me.'

Fancying that he was softening, I asked 'Figs' whether his brazen talk was not all bravado—whether he had not often felt ashamed of the unmanly line of life he had adopted. 'Can't say I have, sir. Well—yes, I did *once* feel downright ashamed of myself. It was at Chelmsford. The Three Queens I was stopping at, and I was going along the London Road when an old lady looked over her garden gate. There's some tidyish little houses along the London road. "Poor man," says the old lady, "you look very hungry, and as if you'd like a job." "Yes, ma'am," says I, "I *am* very hungry, and I *should* like a job." "Well, then," says she, "come in, my poor man, and I'll give you some breakfast, and then I'll give you a job." And a jolly good breakfast she gave me in her kitchen—coffee with cream in it, and as much as I liked to have of buttered toast. I'd had a good feed before I started, and so it was hard work to eat all that the old lady wanted me to—but she liked me all the better for being so modest. She kept the servant girl toasting for me till her face was as red as a brick, and "Don't spare the butter, Jane," says she, "it ain't often this poor man can get a meal." I'd hard work to keep from bursting out laughing, but I didn't. When she'd let me give over at last, she took me down to a bit of grass in her garden, and says she, "Now, my good man, I want you to roll this for an hour, and I'll give you a shilling—that's more than you've had for a week, I suppose?" (My opinions were different, but that wasn't the time to

express 'em.) "I'm sure you'll roll it well—you've such an honest face." "Thankee, ma'am," says I, "I hope I have. A man *may* be honest, though he *is* poor." "Of course he can," says she. "I hope you don't think I wanted to wound your feelings, my poor man. I'm going down into the town for an hour, and when I come back, you'll have finished, and I'll pay you." I clutched hold of the handle of the roller, and set to as if I was going to work like a steam-engine, but before the old lady was in-doors, I was down with my back against a tree, having a pipe. I was up again at the roller, though, by the time I thought she'd have got her bonnet and shawl on. She was a neat old body, of a Quaker kind of cut, and I guessed she'd be a pretty good bit about it. But, bless you, *she* never looked at me when she came out—she was so sure that I was honest. I was up again by the time I thought she'd be back. She was a bit late, and so I had to trundle that confounded old roller pretty brisk for five minutes or so. Up she came running like a partridge, but I didn't take any notice of her till she was right on me. "Oh," says she, out of breath, "my poor man, I'm so sorry I've kept you waiting. And you've done it so nicely—how hard you must have been working, with your feeble frame!" Blessed if she didn't give me a bull, and advise me to put half of it into the savings' bank. Yes, I *did* feel a bit ashamed when I took it—I hadn't earned it anyway. I hadn't had to set my wits against hers. She'd done my business for me. The innocence of the poor old silly was downright touching.'

I have made a chapter of these cadger-confessions just

now, because in the winter month in which I have been turning over my diary to prepare my present Episodes, frightful destitution once more prevails, and is likely for some time to prevail, in the East End. Wanting every penny we can get for our genuine poor, I am more than ever anxious to warn the charitably-disposed against the sham poor. Let all who have money or goods to give for the relief of their suffering fellow-countrymen, make it a religious duty to ascertain, either by personal inquiry amongst the poor, or by a strict eye kept over the agency they may select as their almoner, that their gifts really go to those who are really in want of them. Otherwise they may merely manure our already rankly rampant mendicancy, and rob the very people they wish to serve. It is a sin, and not a virtue, to scatter money for what school-boys call a 'scramble' in a distressed district. In the pauper parish, as in the playground, the sturdiest beggars, under such circumstances, are sure to appropriate the bulk of the indiscriminate donation.

CHAPTER XIX.

BANJO AND HIS SISTER.



HACKERAY makes one of his characters say, 'What a master—nay, destroyer—of the affections want is !' There is truth in this. It would be ridiculous to pretend that poverty does not often breed in a family a gross, grasping selfishness which makes the poverty still more ghastly. But if this is, perhaps, the rule, there are noble and numerous exceptions to it. In the present and the following chapter, I will give two of the many that have fallen under my own notice.

The street Ethiopian serenader is not, I fear, generally speaking, a very estimable character. He has taken to his peculiar calling, as a rule, because he hates work, and likes a vagabond life, coupled with chances of drink. There are times, no doubt, in which he makes more than he could have got from his previous employment, when he has been a working man of any kind; but there are

often also times in which he makes a good deal less than he might have got if he had stuck heartily to work. It is the beery Bohemianism of his peripatetic profession which attracts him. The street Ethiopian serenader of whom I am about to write was in some respects not much better than the majority of his brethren ; but he had a genuine love for a sick sister—a love which manifested itself in self-denial for her sake.

I made my acquaintance with him thus.

I was visiting a sick parishioner in a quiet side-street, when a company of serenaders—then more novel than they are now—accompanied by a noisy crowd, came and struck up an air, with a tumultuous vocal and instrumental chorus, under the very window of the invalid. They seemed to have selected their stand because they had seen the window-blind drawn down. The poor young fellow I was visiting—the only son of a respectable widow in straitened circumstances—had been just dropping off to sleep when the vile din of cracked tenor, bull-like bass, idiotic ‘Yah, yah, yah,’ scraped fiddle, thumped tambourine, tortured concertina, twanged banjo, and clattering bones began ; but the noise instantly brought him back to his former state of tossing unrest. His mother gave her little maid a penny, and bade her give it to the men, and bid them go away, because there was some one ill in the house. The only result of this mission, however, was an outburst of choral confusion worse confounded ; and, therefore, I went out to see what I could do. ‘Bones,’ half-drunk and very impudent, made himself the spokesman of the company. He rattled his bones in my face,

and said that if Englishmen *did* do the niggers, they *wasn't* niggers to be druv away by anybody, when they was earnin' a honest livin'. They'd a right to play in the Queen's highway, and play they would, if they wasn't paid for goin'. If folks *was* ill, they wasn't to stop *them*, unless they paid accordin'. Give 'em a bob, and they'd go then.

'Very well, then,' I said : 'I shall go for a policeman.'

'Don't you wish you may get him?' retorted the bibulous Bones—

"Go away, go away," says the shabby-genteel ;

"Go away, go away," says *he* ;

"He's too much of a scurf to give us a bob,

But he'll bring, *if he can*, a bob-bee."

Now then, boys, go on with the consort.'

But Banjo refused to join in. 'You shut up, Bones,' he cried. 'The gentleman spoke civil enough to you ; and if there's anybody ill in there, it's a jolly shame to keep 'em awake with our row.'

Tambourine, Fiddle, and Concertina, who were going to follow Bones's lead, looked half ashamed when Banjo spoke up in this way, and the company took their departure : Bones stopping at the corner of the street to clatter his bones once more, and give me a Parthian shot in the shape of a 'yah—*yah*—YAH' of profoundly contemptuous disgust.

Shortly afterwards I met Banjo in his white hat, exaggerated shirt collar, and absurd dress-coat, walking along by himself, with his instrument under his arm. He

was shaking himself as if all his bones were out of joint, rolling his eyes, and baring his teeth, as if he were chewing the cud of most rollickingly facetious fancy, mincing as if the ground were not good enough for him to tread on, and yet hurrying as if a crowded opera-house were impatiently waiting for his appearance. But when I spoke to him—to thank him for his backing—he instantly dropped his professional manner. ‘It *was* a shame, sir,’ he said; ‘but then Simpson was half slewed—he was sewn up before we got home that night. I know what illness is. I’ve got a sick sister at home. Religion ain’t much in my line, but I know it when I see it, and a real down-right religious gal she is, and no mistake. If you could give a look in now and then, sir, it would be a real kindness to the poor dear gal. There she lies all day without a soul to speak to. I’m out all day; and when I’m in, I haven’t the knack of talkin’ about the things she’d like to hear about. I’m not a hypocrite, sir—that I *can* say of myself—but really I’ve felt as if I should like to sham pious, if I only knew how, to please that poor gal. Though it wouldn’t be no good after all. When anybody’s the real thing themselves, it’s easy for ’em to spot them as isn’t, however hard they may sham. But if you’ll call now and then to see my poor sister, sir, you’ll do her a real kindness, and though I ain’t in the religious line myself, I shall be very grateful to you, sir. No. 17, Bertha Street, three-pair back, is where we live. Good-mornin’ to ye, sir, and thank ye, sir.’

A minute afterwards Banjo had resumed his consequentially-comic look and dislocated gait, but as I watched

him careering along the street, escorted by an ever-growing crowd of widely-grinning youngsters, I could not help feeling a kind of respect for the kind-hearted, black-faced buffoon.

I paid my first visit to 'No. 17, Bertha Street, three-pair back,' pretty early in the morning, in the hope of being able to see Banjo as well as his sister. I was just in time to have a word with him. No answer being given when I knocked at the door of the three-pair back, I opened it and walked into a very scantily-furnished chamber. One side was curtained off with sacking. This rough curtain was lifted, and I saw Banjo in professional costume stooping down to kiss a poor pinched girl who lay on a low bed within, before he went out to his professional labours for the day. 'I'm glad you've come, sir—I said you would,' was his remark when he looked round. 'Nance, this is the clergyman I was telling you about. Come inside, sir—wait a bit, I'll get you a chair. What was chairs made for but to be sat upon? And we've got two, hain't we, Nance? so there's a choice. This un, though, has got a bit of the bottom out, so you shall have the one I'm keeping for Nance when she gets up to make my breakfast the week after next. There, sir, sit ye down, and talk away, and thank ye, sir. Good-bye, old gal, I'm off now—I shan't be late. Good-mornin', sir, and thank ye, sir.'

So speaking, he cocked his white hat still more on one side, and stalked sprawlingly to the door, strumming on his banjo. He turned round to give his poor sister a good-bye grin, which had a great deal of love in it, then made

us both a very low, mock-reverential bow, and softly closed the door after him. The poor girl had smiled faintly at her brother's antics, and reflected with interest his look of love.

'A kind-hearted fellow your brother seems to be,' I said to her.

'*That* he is, sir,' she answered eagerly. 'A better brother never breathed. There ain't many brothers that would burden themselves with a poor helpless thing like me.'

'Have you been long an invalid?'

'Going on for four year I've been here now, and instead of getting tired of me, he's almost kinder to me than he was when I first come.'

'I suppose he makes a good deal of money?'

'Yes, sir, sometimes he may make a tidyish bit, but then most men wouldn't think it was enough to divide between two; and sometimes it's very little indeed he gets. Much or little, however, he will make me take what I want, however he's off himself. And he don't sit moping as if he was making a martyr of himself, but seems merriest, I think, when he's worst off. Of course, he does that to cheer me up.'

'You must be very lonely here by yourself?'

'Not so very, for Tom makes me keep a bird—here he is by the bed—though the seed comes to more than he can well afford in hard times. But he says I want a companion, and a dear little chap Dick is. Tom puts the cage by the bed before he goes out, so that I can get at it, and when I open the door, Dick 'ill hop out and light on my head,

and then he'll fly about the room, and then he'll fly back and perch on the cage, and sing as if he'd burst himself.'

'It is astonishing how much cheerfulness one of these little mites can throw round one.'

'Yes; and how wise Dick is! As soon as he sees that I want to go to sleep, he's as mum as a mouse. He's a fond little chap—he nestles up to me like a child. But he's twice as fond of Tom as he is of me. Rare games they'll have when Tom comes home. Dick maybe's been moping, but he brightens up as soon as he hears Tom's step, and hops away to hide. "Tweet, tweet," he says, for all the world like a child crying "Whoop," and then there's a hunt and a chase, and when Tom's penned Dick up in a corner, he'll ruffle up his feathers and make believe to bite him, and then he'll hop on his shoulder, and walk up his fingers like a ladder, and let Tom balance him on the top of a stick, and swing in Tom's handkerchief just like a child. Him and Tom have whistling matches—Tom's a very pretty whistler. Yes, sir, Dick certainly is a great amusement to me, and a real beauty he is, when his ash-coloured tail feathers is out. He's a Belgian—Tom gave five shillings for him. He's been moulting lately, but you can see the grey tail-feathers just sprouting like out of the gold.'

The poor girl, who was suffering from incurable spin 1 complaint, seemed as if she could never weary of talking of her brother. 'And when flowers is in, Tom's pretty sure to bring me a bunch of some sort. He's very free with his money—twopence he'll give for a *chameleon*—

them red and white waxy flowers like roses, with the glossy green leaves. I'd rather have a penny bunch of vi'lets, because the smell of them puts me in mind of old times.'

'You were not always in London then?'

'No, we was bred in the country, and when we used to go picking vi'lets, we didn't think we should ever be living together in smoky London. But what should I do without Tom, now, sir? They couldn't do me any good in the hospital where I went, and I should have had to be sent to the workhouse, if Tom hadn't taken me. He would have me. We was always from children very fond of each other, and it was partly because Tom was in London that I came up from the country and took a place here. I was afraid that he was getting a bit wild, and thought that, perhaps, I might do him a bit of good. But there you see, sir, God has so ordered it that it's Tom that takes care of me, poor dear boy.'

'What part of the country do you come from?'

'Burnham Market in Norfolk, sir. There's ever so many Burnhams about there—one of them where the great Lord Nelson was born—but it's a very sleepy part of the country, except when the gentlemen are out with their dogs and their guns. You can hear the turnips growing down there, is a saying. So it's no wonder a high-spirited lad like Tom should want to see a little more life. 'So up he came to London, and got a porter's place, and I wish he'd stuck to it, poor fellow. But he'd a good voice, and was always fond of fun and company, and those nigger singers began to go about, and he fell in

with those he's with, and joined 'em. That was before I came to live with him. I wish he'd some other line of life, poor boy. It exposes him to a deal of temptation in the way of drink—not that he often comes home the worse for it, and when he does he never says a cross word to me, but just goes to bed quiet, as if he was ashamed of himself.'

'But he would not have to be ashamed of himself, if—'

'That's true, sir, but he's such a dear, kind brother I can't bear to say anything against him. And then, you know, sir, he's got into a way of making a joke of everything, and when I want to speak serious to him, he tries to put me off with something funny. I don't find fault with his spirits, poor boy—they're often a comfort to me. Jokes are very good things in their way, but there's a many things you don't like to hear joked about.'

'Very true ; life is too serious to be only laughed at—this life and the one to come.'

'Anyhow, I don't feel much inclined to laugh when I lie awake at night, and hear the church clocks chime the quarters and strike the hours for four or five hours at a stretch.'

'Does Tom ever sing to you?'

'Some of the songs he have to sing seem downright silly to me—he don't sing 'em at home now, because he knows they vex me. It don't seem a life worthy of a man to go about singing such stuff.'

'Those who give money to hear them are as much to blame.'

‘But some of the sentimental songs, as he calls ’em, are very pretty. I like to hear *them*. There’s “Mary Blane,” and “Lucy Neal,” and “Ben Bolt,” too, I like, though the young woman it’s about, as was always weeping with delight when you gave her a smile and trembling through fear at your frown, couldn’t have been a comfortable party to live with, I should say.’

‘No ; I think not.’

‘There’s another about somebody sitting by the river and weeping all the day. The tune’s very pretty, but I don’t hold with so much crying, no more than I do with laughing always.’

‘One can’t help crying sometimes, but we must learn to bear what God has thought fit to send upon us—crying over it all day long won’t do any good to any one.’

‘But Tom’s a dear good fellow, and of a Sunday night he’ll sing me the Evening Hymn, and he can chant “I will arise and go unto my Father” beautiful. That *do* make me cry—if he only meant what he was sayin’, poor fellow ! And he’ll always read the Bible to me when my eyes are tired, though he don’t seem to care for it as I should like to see him.’

After a pause, she added, anxiously : ‘I hope you don’t think, sir, that I’m finding fault with Tom. I should be an ungrateful wretch if I did. It’s just because I’m so fond of him that I can’t help grieving to see that he don’t care about the things that give me my comfort. Kind as he is, what should I do lying here, if I couldn’t trust in God and hope to meet my blessed Saviour in heaven ?’

‘It must be very solemn to lie all alone, and hear the noise outside that you have no share in.’

‘I wouldn’t care if I could but see my poor Tom setting his face Zionward. I could then say, “Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace”—though it would be a sore trial to part from him, and I do believe he’d fret for me, trouble as I am to him.’

‘He doesn’t seem to think anything a trouble that he can do for you.’

‘No, no. Last thing at night he comes to tuck me in, and put my orange handy for me, and if he hears me moaning in the night, he’s up to see what he can do. I can’t help moaning sometimes when I fancy he’s asleep—it seems to let a little bit of the pain out. And then in the morning he lights the fire, and gets my breakfast for me, and puts my Bible, and the bird, and everything else I want handy before he goes out.’

‘But does no one else come to attend you?’

‘Oh yes, he pays a woman down below to cook me a bit of dinner, and get my tea for me. Sometimes, perhaps, he don’t come home quite as soon as he might at night, but that ain’t to be wondered at. I’m sure I shouldn’t grudge him a bit of pleasure, poor fellow, if I wasn’t afraid it was doing him harm. And often he do come home as soon as ever he’s knocked off singing, and do all he can to ‘liven me up.’

‘I hope he does not leave you alone on Sunday.’

‘It ain’t often that he does, and when I’ve got him that’s my nicest day. He’s quieter then, specially in the evening, and sometimes he’ll let me talk to him a bit. When you’re

without company all the week, it's a real treat to have your own brother with you all day Sunday—and then he's so kind and handy in his ways—no woman can beat him at cooking or at nursing either. Often I want him to go to church, but he says, “No, if I go out, I shan't go to church—so I had better stop where I am, Nance.” So I've to quiet my conscience with that, and I'm afraid I'm too ready, because it's so nice to have Tom at home.'

XX.

‘MARCH HARE.’



ONE day when I was going out of my house, I almost ran against an old woman who had come up to ring the bell—meanwhile dolefully chanting ‘Hare-skins—rabbit-skins?’

A skin or two dangled from her arm, and they were the only warm-looking wraps she had about her. In spite of great coat, comforter, muffetees, and cork-soles, the bleak east wind had nipped me when I opened the front door, but this poor old creature was shivering in a cotton gown that had lost all ‘body’ and definable colour from long wear and many washings, and a shawl so threadbare that the wind must have rushed through it like water through a net. She stooped as if she found the burden of life too heavy for her, and had the half stern, half stolid look which a lifetime of cloud, scarcely ever broken by the merest glimpse of light, generally gives to those unto whom such days and nights are appointed.

‘Any hare-skins or rabbit-skins?’ she repeated with mechanical monotony when I made my appearance. ‘Oh! I thought you had brought me a hare,’ I said by way of joke, pointing to the hare-skin dangling from her arm. ‘I’m too busy to shoot hares, even if I had the chance, and I’m too poor to buy hares—and no one ever sends me any.’ Instead of smiling at my very mild facetiousness, the old woman instantly turned away and went along the street, raising from time to time her dreary chant. Time was too precious to her to be wasted in idle chat with one who offered such poor chances of his ever being available for the extension of her business.

As the bent, miserably-poor old woman went down the straight, cold, grim street with the hare-skin hanging over her arm, the brambled woodlands in which the hare had frolicked, the grassy lanes along which it had scampered, the green corn it had nibbled in the dewy moonlight, were scarcely more difficult to realize than the comfortable dinner-table at which, most probably, it had been eaten. It was through having been led to think of the contrasts between the surroundings of the hare and those of the old woman who would make her little profit out of the sale of its skin, that I chanced to take particular notice of her; and so was able to recognize her when I met her a week or two afterwards. She was turning into a little paved court, a pinched oblong, with an opening that was a mere slit between the houses of the street on which it gave. Its own little houses were two-floored, but a tall man standing on tiptoe could almost have looked into their upper windows. If the doors of the two rows of

hovels that stared into each other's faces with lack-lustre eyes had opened outwards, they would nearly have met. At the bottom of the court rose a high dead wall. Nevertheless, this *cul de sac* was used as a drying-ground, damp, dusky sheets, shirts, &c., hanging thickly from the lines stretched across it. Beneath the dripping clothes ragged children were sprawling and squabbling on the filthy flags, and in a corner at the bottom of the court half-a-dozen lads were playing at pitch and toss.

A man stood watching them: a man of thirty, with scraps of paper pinned here and there, for ornament, upon his ragged clothes, and a roll of paper, torn at the end into a rough imitation of a plume, stuck into the band of his hat, the semi-detached crown of which stood up over his shaggy hair like the lid of an opened preserved-meat tin. 'There's mammy, March Hare,' cried one of the lads, and the poor idiot came capering up to the poor old hare-skin collector. Each seemed delighted to see the other. The old woman's sternly sombre face broke out into a fond mother's smile as she greeted her poor prancing son, but 'March Hare's' face soon clouded. 'Lollies, mammy, lollies,' he wheedled, holding out his hand like a monkey's paw. When his mother told him that she had not been able to bring him any lollies, he put his finger in his mouth, and sulked. 'Lollies to-morrer, perhaps, Tommy,' said the old woman. 'Come in with mammy now, like a good boy.' 'No, s'an't,' lisped poor Tommy, stamping his foot like a spoilt child. She persuaded him to go in with her, however, and they disappeared in the entry of one of the houses.

I had not time to make inquiries about them then, but one evening when I had a little leisure I went to the house. The little children squatted on the doorstep maintained a solemn silence when I asked them in which room the old woman who sold hare-skins lived. They did not budge an inch to enable me to pass through their serried ranks; so I had to make a long stride over their matted heads. Then one of them condescended to say, 'Up-stairs—right afore ye,' and, at this remark, although I was puzzled to discover the point of the joke, the whole company of infantry grinned and chuckled. The door they had pointed out stood open, and when I looked into the little room, I saw the poor grown-up baby seated on his mother's knee, sucking a bit of sugar-stick, at the same time pouting his sticky lips, in baby style, for the kisses which his poor old mother was giving him. 'He's not himself, poor boy, and so you see, sir, I humour him,' she said. 'Run out now, Tommy, and play like a good boy, becos me and the gentleman wants to have a talk.'

'Got any lollies?' said Tommy, getting off his mother's knee, and sidling up to me. 'Tommy likes lollies.' He looked so disappointed when he found I had none, that I gave him a penny to buy some, and then he departed in high glee. My young friends of the doorstep had been peeping into the room, and rushed down before him, shouting—

'The swell's guv March Hare a penny, and he's a-goin' to spend it!'

'He won't get much out o' that, won't poor Tommy, thank you all the same, sir,' said the old woman. 'He's

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uncommon fond o' sweeties; but he'll give 'em all away to the little 'uns, if they axes him, and they takes advantage of him.'

'Do they tease him?'

'No, sir; neither them nor the other folks about here as knows him: they're all kind to him in their way, and 'ill take his part, if they sees strangers puttin' on him. But then poor Tommy goes roamin', and gits 'unted by bad boys elsewheres. He'll come 'ome kivered with muck, and cryin' as if 'is 'eart 'ood break. Ah, sir, it's a sore trial to a mother to see a fine 'andsome chap like him runnin' up to her jest as if he was a baby—and him all she's got in the world, poor feller.'

I had not noticed poor Tommy's good looks; but then I had not his mother's eyes to look at him with. As delicately as I could, I asked why he was called March Hare.

'Well, you see, sir, it's partly along o' my sellin' the skins, and partly becos he ain't quite right. "As mad as a March hare," you know, they says—the hares goes mad in March, I'm told—all on 'em. Though if they isn't madder than my poor boy, they'll do no harm. It's astonishin', sir, what sense he have sometimes: he ain't half as silly as he seems. It's only his funny ways as makes folks think he is. God's give him sich a 'appy 'eart, that he can't 'elp caperin' about at what seems queer times to most folk; but Tommy's a sight more brains, hid away like, than many as laughs at him. He fair frightens me the way he talks sometimes—jest as if he was a-talkin' wi' angels. He *see* a angel down by the

lamp-post, outside the court, and if *that's* bein' silly, I wish I was silly, too ; for I don't see no angels, and it 'ud be a change to sich as me.'

'And to a good many more, I suspect.'

'Well, the kindness of that poor boy you wouldn't believe. I tries to keep about for both our sakes ; but now and then I gits laid up, and to see the way my poor Tom 'angs about me, and does what he can, poor dear, 'ud surprise you, sir. I pray God I may keep him as long as I can do for him ; but when I've been a-lyin' 'ere, not knowing but what I might be gone afore to-morrer, I've prayed as God 'ud take my poor Tommy afore me ; for there 'ud be nobody as could understand him when I was gone. They'd shut Tommy up, and that he never could abide.'

'Can he do anything to help you ?'

'I've no doubt he could, sir, and he'd be willing enough, poor boy, but then you see folks has a prejudice agin flighty ways in the way o' business, and besides, Tommy's so kind-hearted, he'd be sure to git took in. But what he can he does. He'll have the kittle bilin' for me when he don't 'appen to forgit it, poor boy, and he'll tidy up the place accordin' to his notions—it ain't ezackly my way, but then he looks jest as if I'd scolded him if I puts the things straight, and so when poor Tom's been a-tidyin' I lets the things be till he's out o' the way agin.'

'I suppose he never goes far from home ?'

'Oh, he'll go out into the country and bring me 'ome great boughs o' May, and bundles o' buttercups and blue bells that you couldn't grapse in your two hands, sir.

The room's like a bower spring time and summer. But Tommy can't abear to see the flowers a-witherin'. He'll pull 'em down in a rage like, but he don't chuck 'em into the court. He makes a great 'eap o' them, and carts 'em back into the country next time he goes for more. He's got a fancy that they'll git better if he takes 'em 'ome—that's what Tommy calls it.'

'Do you ever go into the country with him?'

'No, sir, I've enough walkin' about in the town. All day long I'm at it, and sometimes I don't git a single individual skin. It's years since I was as far as the Forest—not since I was married.'

'Did you ever see a hare running then?'

'No, sir, I never see a live hare and never tasted a dead un. Some o' the neighbours goes to the Forest sometimes in a wan, but I hain't no money to spend on wans, and if I had, my poor Tommy 'oodn't go. You couldn't git him into a wan—no, sir, not if you offered him ten thousand golden guineas, nor not if it was to save his life.'

'How is that?'

'I was in the family-way with him when his poor father was killed by one o' them lumberin' brewers' drays—had his 'ead smashed as you'd scrunch a black beetle, sir—and that's what upset poor Tommy's mind. Bad boys tries to pull him up to a wan, or a cart, or anything that's got wheels, sometimes, and tells him he must git in, jest to tease him. But it ain't a safe game to play. It drives my poor Tommy downright wild. He'll howl so as it's awful to 'ear 'im, and bite and kick and do anything he

can to git away. Ah, that was the beginnin' of my troubles! My husband was a steady young man, and we was very fond o' one another, and we 'adn't been married a year. P'r'aps he might ha' got tired on me, and cross to me like other men, if he'd lived, but I don't believe he 'ood, anyhow he hadn't the chance. My poor Tommy was born in the workus, but, please God, he shan't die there—no, nor the workus shan't bury him, if I can 'elp it.'

'Has he lived with you ever since he was born?'

'Yes, sir, when I came out of the workus, I brought Tommy with me, and we hain't been parted since. He was sich a comfort to me when he was quite a little un—not but what he's a comfort to me now—I'd never part with him; but that was different. I used to thank God so as he was a boy, and not a gal. The men al'ays gits the best of it in this world, however 'tis in the next. I thought he'd grow up a steady tradesman like his father, and then I should have some un to lean on agin.'

'And you were never married again?'

'P'r'aps I might ha' got married agin if I'd wanted—anyhow, I wasn't axed, and I didn't want neither. "I'll look arter my boy," I used to say to myself, "and he'll be a comfort to me." The neighbours as see the child used to say that he didn't take notice and behave like other babies; but I thought that was jest envy becos he was sich a much finer child than theirs. "He *ain't* like other children," I'd tell 'em back, boastin' like, "as you'll find when he grows up." It was a long, long time afore I'd let myself believe that he *was* different from other

children in another kind o' way, but I was forced at last, and a sore trial it were to me.'

'But God fits the back to the burden.'

'I know that, sir, and if it wasn't for fearin' as I might die afore him, and leave him with nobody to care for him, I could almost be glad that my poor Tom is as he is. If he'd had all his right senses, he mightn't ha' loved his mother as he do now that he's got nobody else to hold to. He'd ha' had a wife and little uns of his own, and p'raps he'd ha' thought nothin' o' me. He's a real comfort to me, sir, though you mightn't think it. He's so fond o' me. Though he's sich a great big chap, his heart haven't growed like out of knowledge. He'll snuggle up to me and stroke my face, jest as he would when I 'ad him at the breast.'

On my asking her as to the kind of living she made she went on,—

'Me and my poor Tom has been pretty nigh starvin' sometimes, but, thank God, we've got through the hard times somehow, as the sparrers does, and there never was a cross word betwixt us. And, as I was a-sayin', Tom ain't half as silly as folks makes him out to be. It 'ud be long afore a good many o' them 'ud say the improvin' things my poor Tom do at times. He'll be talkin' all kinds o' stuff that I can't make neither head nor tail of, and then, all of a sudden, he'll look round sharp like a bird and say somethin' jest like a bit out o' the Bible. It was only last week he'd been goin' on with his games, though I couldn't 'elp cryin', for I'd done uncommon bad, and how I was to pay my rent I didn't

know. Well, sir, poor Tommy see me, and up he come, and says he, "No cry, no cry. Laugh like Tommy." "Ah, my poor boy," says I, "I wish I could." "God loves merry folk," says Tom. Well, sir, that set me a-thinkin', as Tom's sayin's often does. Anyhow, if I couldn't be merry, I thought I wouldn't be mopish. It seemed a sin like, and my poor boy so cheerful. So I shook myself up, and things looked a deal brighter. If you believe in God, it do seem a sin to go about as if you was at a funeral—there ain't much faith in that—though it's uncommon 'ard for sich as me to cheer up sometimes.'

When I heard this poor old woman inculcating the duty of Christian cheerfulness, I could not help thinking of the heads always bowing like a bulrush, the faces never relaxing into a smile, that I had seen in 'Christian homes' crammed with all kinds of comfort. The repellent effect which such visages must have upon the young has often been pointed out, but we are too apt to look upon persistent dolefulness of this kind as merely an unfortunate weakness, whereas it is really, as the old woman called it, a sin.*

In reply to further inquiries about her calling, the old woman said :—

* On this point I may quote a pregnant little paragraph from Mrs Jameson :—'Dante placed in his lowest hell those who in life were melancholy and repining without a cause, thus profaning and darkening God's blessed sunshine ; and in some of the ancient Christian systems of virtues and vices, melancholy is unholy and a vice ; cheerfulness is holy and a virtue. Lord Bacon also makes one of the characteristics of moral health and goodness to consist in "a constant quick sense of felicity, and a noble satisfaction."' "

‘Well, sir, my trade ain’t like a good many—it’s briskest in winter. There’s more skins to be picked up then, and they’re better. God gives the poor things more hair in the winter to keep ’em warm. I’ve sometimes wished my gown ’ud grow thick like that, but then, arter a manner o’ speakin’, it *is* somehow that way with me, becos I can do best when the weather’s cold. But then the coals runs away with the money—so p’raps it don’t make much difference—and you want to eat more when the weather’s sharp. Poor Tommy’s appetite is good, and it goes agin my heart to stint him—I’d far rather go without myself—but sometimes I’m forced to. My earnin’s ain’t much to keep two people on: 2*d.*, and sometimes more, I’ve to give for a skin, and then I only git a ha’penny by it.’

‘Where do you go to church?’

‘I don’t go to church nor to chapel—not reg’lar chapel—neither. I haven’t got fit clothes, nor Tommy hasn’t, and they wouldn’t let him run about at a reg’lar place o’ worship as they does where we goes.’

I found that a good, simple-hearted man, a genuine Christian, though he *was* a ‘Christian unattached,’ had hired for Sunday services a room in the neighbourhood, used as a dancing-room during the week. Here he had gathered together a little flock of human strays, to whom he tried to do good on week-days also, so far as his scanty leisure and small means would permit. What I heard of his unassuming teaching and beneficence interested me greatly. I determined to attend one of his services as soon as I could find an opportunity. It is not often that an East End curate finds himself without ‘duty’ on a

Sunday, but one Sunday morning I was in that condition, and started for 'Battersby Hall.' Its only frontage to the street was a cramped entrance-passage, which I should have passed without noticing it, had not a board-bill, inviting all to enter, 'free seats and no collection,' leaned against the door-post, and one or two depressed women been dropping into the passage. I followed the depressed women into an oblong room, with fixed forms running along its sides, and a few movable forms placed across it at the top; behind them, on a little platform, stood a deal table and a stool. A few women who looked as if all energy had been worn out of them, and one or two feeble old men, were dotted about the forms. I seated myself in a corner near the door, where I could see without being seen, and watched the rest of the congregation come in. They were much of the same class—about fifty in all; amongst them the old hare-skin gatherer and poor Tommy. A mild little man in a brown coat and checked neckerchief took his place behind the table, gave out a hymn, and started the tune. Very thin and quavering was the congregational singing that followed, but all the singers seemed to find a comfort in it. As long as the singing lasted March Hare was as still as a mouse, but during the rest of the service—until the singing began again—he wandered about the room on tiptoe, smiling vacantly at everything and everybody. After a prayer which called forth many a half-smothered amen, the little man in the brown coat read a chapter from the New Testament, and then he took a text, and talked kindly about it to his people—there was no attempt at set ser-

monizing. Perhaps there was nothing that would have struck critical sermon-hearers in what he said, except an occasional slip in grammar or pronunciation, but *his* hearers drank in his words. They had reached another oasis in their life's desert. They had come from miserable homes, in which there was no privacy or quiet, to rest from work for a while in a tranquil room (in which poor Tommy's movements were not more disturbing than a butterfly's flittings) and hear a good man, in whom, with much reason, they had full confidence, tell them, in his simple quiet way, of the everlasting rest which remaineth for the people of God. They looked sorry when he had finished, but they sang the final hymn more heartily than the first, and gave lustier amens to the last prayer. 'The peace of God which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord: and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you always,' said the unassuming preacher; and after a minute's silent lingering on their knees, his congregation rose, exchanged quiet greetings with him, and then slowly crept back to their dreary homes—made far less dreary because they carried back to them, out of that peculiar little conventicle, some portion of that priceless peace. Poor Tom, no longer on his good behaviour, capered and chuckled merrily in the open air, but he, too, looked more easy in his mind because he had been to hear the brown-coated little evangelist of Battersby Hall.

XXI.

ALONE IN LONDON.



MAN may live for years in London, and not know the name of his next-door neighbour. Lives may be revolutionized by joy or sorrow within a few feet of him, and he may have no suspicion of the fact, unless he happens to see a train of wedding or funeral carriages in the street. His wife knows a little more than he knows of his neighbour's concerns, his servants know a little more than his wife does ; but all the knowledge, put together, is very slight and very vague, unless a bridegroom, an undertaker, a baby, or a bailiff, enters the neighbour's house. Even doctors' visits—when the doctor is a strange doctor—are not always noticed ; and a man may be distressed to learn that he was entertaining noisy companions at a time when, only separated from him by a brick and a half, his neighbour or his neighbour's wife was enduring the physical torture, or shuddering under the moral solemnity, of the last moments of their life on earth.

To country-people, such a state of things appears horrible. *They* know what their neighbours have for dinner every day, and when the next tooth of every neighbour's child is due; and they think, therefore, that Londoners must be, not merely fish-blooded, contemptibly cold-hearted, but execrably cruel, to trouble themselves so little as they do about the course of their next-door and over-the-way neighbours' lives. We may, with justice, retort that, though we do not lavish sympathy—a gift, by-the-by, which, proffered as it generally is, wounds at least as often as it heals—although we do not lavish sympathy upon our neighbours in time of suffering, we do not day by day, and even night by night, subject them to persistent, pruriently inquisitive *espionage* of the paltry and yet persecuting kind which obtains in the country—that in no part of the inhabited globe can a man enjoy more undisturbed freedom of thought and rational action than he can in London.

Still there is something sound at the bottom of the country-people's feeling. From a Christian point of view, at any rate, it *does* seem sad that three millions and more of people should be crowded together in this vast, strange jumble of lives which we call 'London' with so little feeling of brotherhood between them. If country people do pry disagreeably into their neighbours' daily life, *per contra*, they are proudly fond of trumpeting the exploits of any one they can anyhow call 'our distinguished fellow-townsman;' but what man living within a radius of half-a-dozen miles from Charing Cross, feels his heart warming

towards another man, however distinguished or undistinguished, on the ground that he is a fellow-Londoner ?'

'Alone in London,' in a modified sense, is a phrase that would describe tens of thousands. The married men amongst them might, or might not, be mourned by their families, if they did not come home, or were brought home dead, at night : under similar circumstances, laundresses and landladies, and their slaveys, might pump up a tear for the bachelors, and then begin at once to provide for the next tenant of the chambers or lodgings. A man, of course, would be missed for a day or two, if he did not return to his desk in an office or a bank, or his work at a shop, a factory, a wharf, or a warehouse. In exceptional cases, a kind-hearted employer would take a real interest in the death or sickness of his employé, and do what he could to mitigate the consequences to the dead or sick man's belongings ; but in the majority of instances, I fear, the interest would be like that of the attorney who had heard that his clerk was drowned, and who, thereupon, exclaimed, 'Confound the fellow ! He had the key of my office in his pocket.' Londoners have the character of being conceited, but in no place in the world—of course I am speaking of the masses of its inhabitants—is the individuality of a man of less consequence than in London. He is only one of a vast crowd, all hungry for employment ; and when his place becomes vacant, it is filled up with a facility that scarcely seems likely to foster conceit.

But there are people in London far lonelier than those I have referred to—paupers without even the cold comfort

of having fellow-paupers to talk with—men and women who are almost literally ‘alone in London.’ *Magna civitas, magna solitudo*—they drink the bitterest dregs of the meaning of that sententiously epigrammatic definition.

I was passing one day a public-house, in what was then my parish. Greatly to my astonishment, in the crowd that was pouring out of it, I saw several small shopkeepers whom I knew, and most of whom I had thought very unlikely *partem solido demere de die* for tipping purposes. I expressed my astonishment to one of them. He very indignantly answered: ‘We’re a jury, sir. I’m the foreman, and that gentleman, with the broad-brimmed hat and the silk umbrella, is the coroner. It’s an inquest, sir. Catch me neglectin’ my business at this time o’ day, if I could help it, but a poor young fool has been and gone and cut his throat, and we’re goin’ to view the body.’

I accompanied the jury to the house of death. By the time we got there the attendant mob had so increased that it was as much as two policemen, stationed on either side of the door like mutes, could do to keep the ragged throng from surging up into the room of death. The lodgers in the house, of course, availed themselves of their privilege to crowd up. The landlady was loud in her professions of regret for the fate of the ‘pore young man.’ She seemed to think that the coroner had come to take her into custody for allowing any one to commit suicide beneath her roof; and in her anxiety to propitiate him, dusted the rail of the banisters as she went up the stairs before him. The chattering crowd stopped talking

when the woman opened the door of the garret in which the corpse lay. There was scarcely any furniture in the room, except the bedless truckle bedstead on which the corpse lay, beneath a mouse-coloured rug, with a clotted gash across the throat. The cold white face looked strangely calm to have that broad mark of desperation straggling blue and brown-red beneath it. A blood-rusted razor, clutched in the rigid right hand, lay upon the rug, which was stained with blood. The threadbare, greasy black frock-coat of the deceased was also spotted with blood, and there was more dry blood on the bare breast. The poor creature had owned no shirt or waistcoat. Scarecrow coat and trousers, one brace, a battered, napless hat, a pair of burst, almost soleless boots, and the bone-handled old razor that had put an end to his life, were the only discoverable articles of which he had possession when he made up his mind to kill himself.

There he lay, looking, as I have said, most strangely calm. His was no 'lovely appearance of death'—there was no positive peace in it; but there was a negative tranquillity in the impassive features, which was almost more blood-curdling than a frozen look of horror would have been. We held our breath as we stood crowded in that gloomy garret. Winter sunshine fell on its grime-clouded window, and made a faint little patch of chequered, dingy light upon the rotten, dusty floor; but the icy face of the corpse was the only thing that lighted the dark bedstead. It was a fearfully wasted face, a deplorably care-furrowed face; but now that the cares that had furrowed it were past, a long-obliterated look of refinement

seemed to have come to the surface again ; and a juryman muttered, 'Poor beggar, he couldn't have been thirty.' No one could speak with certainty as to his age, however —no one knew anything about any part of his life except the last dreary week of it. There he lay, slain by his own hand—a fellow-creature who could no longer endure the life he led amongst his fellows in the richest city in the world, and so had committed suicide just in time to avoid dying of starvation : that was all we knew, or could guess about him. But it was a terrible 'all' for one to think of, standing face to face with that quiet, inexpressibly lonely-looking corpse. Every now and then we read of such cases in the newspapers, and as we cursorily read, we say, with a half-conventional sorrow, 'How very sad —how wickedly foolish to destroy the life that God has given them, instead of bearing their trials like men, and waiting for better times !' But I can assure my reader that one does not feel inclined for moralizing of this kind in such a presence as I have just described. Rightly or wrongly, it is not the dead man one is disposed to blame. The anguished spirit that, so short a time before, tenanted the calm corpse which looks so awfully isolated, has gone home and ta'en its wages—but what those wages are, the watcher shrinks from speculating. He thinks rather of the vast pity of Him who has proclaimed Himself a Father to the forsaken. He trembles when he thinks that he, however unwittingly, may have been one of the careless causes that have brought about so terrible a result.

The landlady's evidence at the inquest ran as follows :

—‘I don’t know the name of the pore young man, sir, nor who he was, nor where he came from. He come to me the last Monday as ever was, and axed me if I could let him have a place to sleep in. He’d a shirt on then, pore young man, and, though I see he were hard up, there was somethin’ in his way o’ talk that made me think he’d seen better days. “Well,” says I, “maybe I can, but you must pay me in advance, and p’raps that’ll be hill-convenient.” Well, sir, that pore young man he took out 2½d., and he said, says he, “That’s all I’ve got.” Well, sir, I pitied the pore young man—he was so nice-spoken,—so I took his coppers, and I said he might have the garret where you’ve seen him a-layin’ a dead corpse, and I’d trust to him to pay me more when he’d got it. “You won’t have to wait long,” says he—wild-like, I remembers now; but then I thought he was in speedy expectations o’ gittin’ work. Well, sir, I took him up to the room where you’ve seen him a-layin’, and says I—for I couldn’t help liking that pore young man—“I’m sorry things ain’t more comfortabler; but when you git your work, I’ll see if I can’t find you a few more things.” “Oh,” says he, wery weary-like, I remembers now, “I only want to git a rest, and I can sleep here as well as on a bed o’ down.” Them was his wery expressions. Well, sir, he stayed in his room all Monday. Tuesday mornin’ he went out, and when he come back, though he’d got his coat buttoned up, I could see that he’d got rid of his shirt. That didn’t make me feel comfortble about my rent, though nobody can’t say I didn’t pity that pore young man. Wednesday and Thursday he was out all

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day, and I began to hope that he'd got work ; but when he come back of the Thursday, he looked that dragged and famished, I could see he hadn't, and so I made up my mind to speak to him about lookin' for other lodgin's yesterday mornin'. You may think, sir, what a turn I got when I went into his room, and see him a-layin' on the bed with his throat cut, and the wery razor he'd done it with in his own hand, and my bedclothes spi'lt with the blood he'd splashed about. I calls up the other lodgers, and *they* all see him, too, jest as he's a-layin' now, 'cept that the blood hadn't clotted ; and Mrs Jack (she's got my parlour) ran for the pollis, and Jack run for the doctor. And that's all I know about that pore young man. If you was to ax me questions for a week, sir, I couldn't tell you no more, and I wouldn't tell you no less, and that I'll take my 'davy of, sir.'

The lodgers, and the policeman, and the surgeon who had been called in, gave their evidence next ; but it was merely a corroboration of the landlady's. No one knew anything of the history of the poor self-destroyer, except its calamitous climax. The coroner summed up, suggesting the usual charitable verdict—charitable, but with some amount of fear of personal responsibility lurking in it. 'People *must* be insane, or they wouldn't rush out of a world in which we get on decently well, and which we help to manage,' is the average juryman's argument. One juryman, however, was obstinate. 'I don't think the young fellow *was* silly,' he said. 'It's plain that, somehow, he couldn't get a living, and so he thought, instead of starving, he'd save himself trouble by killing himself.'

It goes against my conscience to find him insane. From his p'int o' view his conduct seems sensible like.' Such reasoning, of course, was overruled in time, and the usual verdict was returned. It fell to my lot to bury that unfortunate young man—saved by that verdict from the ignominy—brutal ignominy, I think—then often heaped upon the corpse of a wilful self-destroyer. Seldom have I performed a service sadder to myself, or been better able to understand the superstitious feeling—absurd but amiable—which prompts prayers for the dead.

'God pity him,' I found myself saying, as I turned away from the pauper-grave in which lay the nameless corpse, not more alone in London than when it took its last lodging there alive.

XXII.

MR JONES'S FRIEND.

IN spite of the dislike which Mr Jones had professed for 'big lads,' he did not withdraw his favour from Fred when the boy ceased to be a curly-headed little pet. He put him to school, and openly intimated his intention of making him his heir. The boy would have liked to be brought up to the bird-business ; but against this Mr Jones set his face. The old man had got it into his head that the dead young mother would have liked something better for her son, and so declared that Master Fred should have a 'purfession.'

'Not but what I think folks are fools,' said Mr Jones, 'when they've got nothing else to give 'em, to make genteel beggars of their sons, by bringin' 'em up to a purfession, instead o' givin' 'em a good trade they could make a comfortable livin' at. But when I've paid for his schooling, there'll be a tidyish bit left for Fred—so *he's* different ;

and, besides, he's an uncommon smart young chap. His schoolmaster says so, and I can see it myself. He'll make somethin' out, I think, if *he* turns doctor or lawyer, or a architec' or a engineer, or anythin' o' that sort. Anyhow, I've got a notion that it'll please his poor young mother, and so that's how I mean it to be, sir.'

After the change in the bird-seller's character which followed poor Pete's death, the old man ceased from his constant open railings at women ; but a grudge against the sex and other repressed churlishness still lingered in his heart. The theatre, in my opinion, is the only exhibitor of genuine sudden transformation-scenes. At any rate, although Mr Jones's disposition had wonderfully mellowed, it was apt to become clouded by the crust it had thrown off, if he were not, so to speak, very carefully decanted.

Fred's dead mother was still the only woman, outside the Bible, of whom Mr Jones spoke in terms of praise ; and no woman had been allowed to take the place Black Pete had held so long. The old man continued to employ a male factotum. I should rather say that he had a numerous series of such servitors. Notwithstanding the softening of his heart to his fellow-creatures in general, he did not get on nearly so well with the concrete white humanity that could answer him back, as he had got on with the dumb black, to whom his slightest look was lovingly-accepted law.

'I can't tell you how I miss poor Pete,' the old man often said to me. 'Fred's a good boy ; but, of course, when he's got a 'oliday, it's nateral that he should care

more for his mates' company than he do for mine. If it wasn't for my birds and things, I might almost as well be alone in the world.'

I reminded him of that best of all company which we have only to remember to obtain.

'Yes, sir, that's true, and, when I do think of it, I git more comfort from it than I deserve, for not thinkin' of it orfner. But then you see, sir, you can't help wantin' somebody of your own sort to care a bit about you. 'Taint many I want; and jestbecos I've had so few as I could call friends anyways, it do seem hard that now there's none that cares a fig about me. If I was to be layin' dead in my bed to-morrer mornin' at breakfast time, who'd miss me, 'cept my tame rat, 'cos he couldn't git his toast?—an' the birds and things, when 'twas their turn to git their feed?'

'Don't you think I should miss you?'

'Well, maybe, *you* might happen to think of me some day, and git a bit of a turn when you called and found the old chap was gone; but I ain't fool enough to think you'd cry your eyes out after me.'

'And there's Fred, too, isn't there?'

'Yes, I don't say that Fred ain't a good boy. He's a *very* good boy, and nobody can't say to the opposite. I'll do my best to bring him up as his mother would ha' liked, and he shall have my money when I die. I'm findin' no fault with him—I've got no fault to find. Didn't I say that it was on'y nateral that a young lad shouldn't care to stick at 'ome with a sulky old feller like me? But that don't make it none the less lonely.'

I was grieved to find my friend relapsing, in any degree, into his old morbid state of mind. His second state, so far as his own feeling of it was concerned, was likely to be worse than the first. Then, at any rate, he had a shell of misanthropy to protect him from prods and pinches ; but now he had cast that shell. What I feared was that he would soon form another. I called more frequently than my wont to do my little best to retard that formation. One summer evening when I called, I was greatly relieved, since I was greeted with a hearty laugh.

'Well, sir,' said Mr Jones, 'you think me a old growler ; but I've come across an old feller that beats me 'oller—would ha' beat me in my growlin'est days. It's queer what a likin' I've taken to that old chap, though we're mostly at it, 'ammer and tongs, all the time we're together. He's a cute old boy in his talk ; but there ain't a thing that's right, 'cept his way o' thinkin' o' things, accordin' to him, and his way o' thinkin' is that *everything* you see or hear of is bad, and a-gettin' worse, and I can't stand that, though, you know, sir, I don't approve o' argeyment.'

Mr Jones was putting up his shutters, rather earlier than usual. As soon as he had finished, he went on, 'I was goin' round to see old Snap. Perkins is his right name, but Snap's a name he's got, I s'pose, becos he's al'ays a-snappin'. He goes on against parsons, and women, too, a deal worse than ever I did ; but it might do both on ye good to come acrost one another.'

When Mr Jones had informed poor Pete's latest successor that he was going out, and had put on his hat, I

accompanied him to Mr Perkins's. On the way I was informed that Mr Perkins was a dealer in 'waste,' *i.e.* all kinds of printed and MS. paper destined to wrap up cheese, butter, candles, bacon, &c. &c.

He lived on the ground-floor of a shabby little house in a shabby little street, using the 'parlour' for his bed and living-room, and a back room which opened into it by one door for his warehouse. The passage-door of this back-room was screwed up. No answer being given to his knock at the parlour-door, Mr Jones opened it and walked in, motioning to me to follow him. The back-room door was open, and through the doorway we saw a hump-backed old man in dusty shirt-sleeves, with a pipe in his mouth, fumbling about in a mist of tobacco-smoke and a chaos of obsolete stationery. Some of the piles of papers reached to the ceiling. A deep drift of all kinds lay upon the floor ; it crackled like frozen snow as the old man moved about in his slippers. Books without bindings were littered over it ; bundles of blue-books and ottoman-like piles of newspapers rose above it.

'Evenin', Perkins,' said Mr Jones, 'I've brought a clergyman to see you.'

'Then you may take him away again,' was the polite reply. 'I've nothing to give, and if I had, I wouldn't.'

'But he's come to give you something, Snap. I told him you was sadly in want of some good advice.'

'Like your impudence, then—(*to me*) when I'm in want of a parson's advice, sir, I'll send out and order it, but I don't think I should send to you, if I ever *did* want any-

thing in your line—and that ain't likely to happen whilst I've got my senses.'

'Come, Snap,' said Mr Jones, chuckling over his success in drawing his new acquaintance out, 'you mustn't be rude, Snap. Mr B—— is a great friend of mine.'

'*That* don't say much in his favour.'

Doesn't it, Snap? Why, *you're* a great friend of mine too.'

'Am I? I wasn't aware of it.'

The old waste-dealer began to look so vicious, in spite of his having had the best in this passage of words, that I thought it advisable to put an end to the old men's chaffing. I apologized to Mr Perkins for my intrusion, and asked permission to enter his store to get a nearer view of his curious stock.

'Yes, you may come in,' he growled. 'There's nothing to steal that *you* could make any use of—except some old sermons; and I'll sell them to you, if you like, at three-halfpence a pound, because they're a bit mouldy. There's some divinity books, but they've got the backs off. I'll let you have them at trade price. I wouldn't charge a parson more than I would a porkman—why should I? Yes, I would, though—if *that's* what you've come for, if you think you're going to get bargains, I ain't your man—you go and buy fair of the second-hand book-shops. I ain't going to undersell 'em. There's some Greek and Latin books, and French, and that, but p'raps you can't read 'em, though you *are* a parson. I know 'em when I see 'em, and it's as likely as not that's about all

you'd know about 'em. Yes, you may come in if you like.'

It was rather difficult to keep one's temper in conversation with Mr Perkins, but, at the same time, it would have been very absurd to seem ruffled by 'old Snap'—on whose Englishman's castle, after all, I had intruded. Mr Jones, who had been amused at first, had become indignant at his new crony's gratuitous insolence, since *he* had been my introducer, and was going to take up conversational cudgels in my defence; but I managed to quiet him.

'Come in, if you're coming—the both of ye,' old Snap very snappishly exclaimed. 'Stop a bit, can't ye?' he still more snappishly added, when we were about to accept his invitation. 'If there's nothing for you to steal, there's things you can spoil with your muddy boots. Jones needn't look as if he'd bite my head off—I didn't ask either of you to come interrupting me in what I was about, you'll please to remember.'

With legs and arms, whilst he thus spoke, he ploughed and splashed a cutting through the paper-drift for us to walk in. 'There's a seat for you,' he said to Jones, pointing to one newspaper-ottoman, and you can sit down there, sir—if I must call you sir,' he said to me, pointing to another. Snap seated himself on a pile of blue-books, and took rapid puffs at his pipe, as if anxious to compose himself. His shrewd bright glancing eyes, coupled with his unfortunate deformity, gave him a ludicrous resemblance to a grotesque caricature of a squirrel smoking, with its bushy tail showing over its shoulders.

'And now what is it you've come for?' Mr Perkins inquired abruptly.

Picking up a copy with the covers off which lay upon the ground, I asked him if many Bibles were offered him for sale.

'Lots,' he answered. 'Them and Testaments, and Prayer-Books, and Hymn-books, are about the commonest things I get. Shows how the people value them. I've read that they used to have to keep the Bible chained to the desk in churches, that the folks mightn't prig it. That seems a queer way of showing you're fond o' the Bible—prigging. Anyhow, Bibles weren't sold for waste in them days. But nowadays, when you can get a Bible for next to nothing, folks think no more of 'em than they do of a pin. There's sure to be a pin lying about somewhere handy, and so there is a Bible.'

'Well, Snap, ain't that all the better? You can't have too much of a good thing,' remarked Mr Jones.

'That's begging the question, Jones, if you can understand what I mean. I didn't say that I thought the Bible a good thing, or that I didn't. But good or bad, what I mean to say is, that it would be thought a deal more on if it wasn't so common. A herring to my taste is every bit as nice as salmon—what's the reason salmon costs such a sight more? Because it ain't so common.'

'Well, sunlight's common, if salmon ain't; and don't we value *that*? My birds do, I know.'

'I'm not aware that sunlight *is* so very common in this part of the world, except now and then for a spell, and then folks get not to think about it, and

where there's always sunshine, I've heard, the folks get tired of it.'

I asked Mr Perkins what other books found their way to his warehouse. 'Oh,' he answered, 'there's all sorts, as I was telling you—more than you could read. Reams of printed stuff I've bought that nobody ever read except the printers and the feller that wrote it. Whole lots of poetry that could never get even a binding on it. Why will people keep on writing poetry? What's the good of it? It don't tell you anything. And if there *was* any good in it, wasn't there enough of it in the world ever so long ago to satisfy even them that like it? You may choke a dog with pudding. My place I know is sometimes half choked with poetry books and play books. When I go to clear out a place, and see there's poetry in the lot, I tell the folks they ought to let me have it a halfpenny a pound cheaper than the rest, because rhymes is such a drug. Of course, that's my joke, because the paper the poetry's printed on is about the best I get. It's mostly thick and looks extra clean because it *hasn't* been read, and such a precious little bit of print goes to the page. It makes me think of them dumpy wax candles with the mites of wicks—only there's no light to be got out of the poetry, you see.'

'But don't you read any of the books you git hold of, Snap?' said Mr Jones. 'I thought you was a sensibler sort of a man.'

'What *you* thought wouldn't make much difference, one way or the other, Jones. I shouldn't have much

sense if I took to reading them poetry books, and what I'd got would be gone long before I'd finished. Yes, I do read some of the books—doctor's books and such. There's nicish reading in them. I like travels, too, a bit, and now and then I get hold of an interesting Life, but mostly they're about people that nobody ever knew anything about till they was dead, and then somebody makes 'em out to be the wonderfulest people that ever lived.'

'Do you like history, Mr Perkins?' I inquired.

'No, I *don't*; though it's often I've to buy a *Goldsmith*. I bought a big hist'ry book once—*Rollin*, or some such name—it was called—and I thought I'd read it through before I sold it. But it was so precious dry I was choked off before I got to the end of the first vol. What do I care about what people did ever so long ago? None of 'em ever left *me* any money.'

'If we did not know what *some one* did ever so long ago, it would be a poor look-out for you and me and everybody, Mr Perkins. You will find that you *have* had a legacy left you, if you will but read His will.'

'What d'ye mean?'

I picked up one of the coverless New Testaments.

'Oh, it's preaching you're after. You can keep that for Jones; he likes it, or shams to. *I* was talking about hist'ry. Who's to know that it ain't all a make-up? I'd almost as lief read one of them trashy novels. They *do* beat me. Why don't government take up the chaps that writes 'em? If a cove's paid for telling a pack of lies in a court, *he's* took up when he's found out; but a feller's

paid to tell a pack of lies in a book, and puts his name to 'em, as proud as a peacock.'

'You don't think much of authors, do you, Snap?' said grinning Mr Jones.

'Authors! They're a precious lot. I knew one once. He was writing a story for the *Firefly*, and gave himself the airs of a 'toxicated cockrobin. He was going to be famous, he said, and fame brings fortune, the young donkey used to tell me. He wouldn't have his hair cut, because he'd seen pictures of chaps in his line with a lot of hair—p'raps they couldn't pay the barber. But the *Firefly* stopped before it was half a year old, and he never got a penny for his rubbishing story. Lots of periodicals like that I've bought, and great bundles of half-crown ones too, that are going on still. If the chaps that write in them, and the newspaper fellers, too, and the rest of them authors, could see themselves when I've got hold of 'em, p'raps they wouldn't be quite so bumptious. I sell 'em into captivity, and they're usefuller then than they ever were before. One of 'em wraps up a penn'orth of sugar-stick, or half a ounce of shag; and another a bit of liver, or a pound of eights, or something of that sort. I oughtn't to grumble at authors, they're a good help to me. The worst book that ever was writ is worth twopence a pound to me.'

Low as was Mr Perkins's estimate of literature, he still, like literature-loving Elia, made *biblia abiblia* distinctions. Under the quoted head he included Parliamentary Papers, missionary notices, and reports of all kinds. 'Oh, I don't count *these* books,' he growled, kicking the pile of blue-

books on which he sat, when I had made some inquiry about them. 'Presented to both Houses of Parliament, by command of Her Majesty—I wonder if Parliament says Thankee! Who reads 'em? But we've got to pay for the printing. I'd sooner read *Rollin* than them. It's like eating sawdust and putty. And yet, if you'll believe me, I once found a fairy story in a blue-book. If I'd found a fairy in it I couldn't have been startled.'

Although the cynical conceit of the old man had amused me, I had been for some time anxious to give our conversation a more 'edifying' turn, and fancied that his last remark afforded me an opportunity.

'You see, Mr Perkins,' I said, 'it is possible even for you to form a false estimate of things. You thought, from ignorance, that nothing in a blue-book could possibly interest you. I fear that from an infinitely more deplorable ignorance, you have formed a similar opinion in reference to an infinitely more important book—one that you buy and sell for waste-paper, but never read for your soul's good.'

I had made a false move, and old Snap was instantly down upon me.

'Who said the fairy-story pleased me? I thought it silly nonsense. And who are you, to talk about my deplorable ignorance? I expect I make pretty nigh as much a week as you do—more, p'r'ps, when trade is brisk. And I *work* for *my* living, and use my wits. You change places with me, and see if you'd make as much as I do. Now I could do *your* work to-morrow, if I could only put on a solemn face. I could read the prayers, and I've got a lot of old

sermons. I ain't sure though that I could poke myself into places where I wasn't asked, and talk as if I was a saint, and know all the time I wasn't.' Here he paused, but before I could say anything he went on again :—

'I may have my own opinions, but they ain't any concern of yours ; and yours ain't any concern of mine, I'd have you know. It's a free country, they say. I don't know so much about *that*, but, at any rate, men as thinks for themselves, and tries hard to earn a honest living, ain't going to have opinions poked down their throats like pills, by lazy parsons. You ain't a *priest*. There's some sense in them Roman fellers riding the high horse, because they believe, or make believe to believe, that they've got hold of what's the Truth, and no mistake about it ; but you English parsons talk about the right of private judgment, and I'm a-going to exercise it.'

The old man was so wrathful in his rudeness, that I thought any argumentative reply just then would be merely adding fuel to flames.

'I am afraid, Mr Perkins,' I said, 'that I *have* intruded on you when you were busy. May I call again when you have more leisure, and hear something more about your trade?'

Mr Jones, however, struck in, in a very different key.

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Snap. But that's always the way with you. Git you up in a corner, and you fly at a body as wicious as a rat. The fact is, Snap, you're afraid of argeyment, and when anybody begins it when you're in your own house, you bully, be-

cause it *is* your own house. It ain't such a palace that it's a punishment to be druv out of it.'

It was rather droll to hear this speech from the whilom 'argeyment'-shying Mr Jones; but it took instant effect upon Mr Perkins.

'I ain't driving anybody out of my house,' he said. 'I didn't ask you to come, nor your parson either, but you're both of ye welcome to stay as long as you like. I ain't put in any corner, so far as *I* see.'

'Ah, now you're quieting down—I've got a tame rat at home, you know, Snap,' said mischievous Mr Jones.

'You're a rat yourself,' was old Snap's spiteful retort. 'You didn't use to be a saint, I've heard, but now you want to creep up the parson's sleeve.'

To put a stop once more to the old men's sparring, I thought the most sensible thing for us to do would be to retire; but Mr Jones would not consent to this.

'Don't you go, sir,' he said; 'if you do, Snap will brag for a week that he druv me and the parson away because we couldn't answer him. Don't you stir, sir.'

'But suppose I say you *shall* go,' growled Mr Perkins. 'I pay my own rent, and so I've a right to my own rooms, and I owe no rent, and so if you was bum-bailiffs, I could order you off.'

'Of course, Mr Perkins,' I put in, 'we've no right to stay, if you wish us to go; but I should like to part good friends, and I want to hear a little more about your business, if you've no objection.'

'Well, you know how to behave yourself better than Jones—though that ain't saying much. I've no ob-
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jection to your staying a bit longer—you ain't so much in the way ; for I've nothing particular to do to-night. What is it more you want to hear ?'

'I think you said something about the stories that might be made out of the lawyers' briefs you buy—I suppose you fall in with other papers that have histories in them.'

'Yes, some comical hist'ries I've come across in my time, but then the people are all dead years ago, or gone across the sea nobody knows where, and so it don't matter who reads about them. Old account books I buy, and *they* tell tales. Ladies, nor gentlemen either, wouldn't like everybody to know the things they get booked to them. And what good have they done them at last? They're rotting in their graves, with the worms crawling in and out of their eye-holes, for all the stuff they bought to make fools think them pretty. The bad debts, too, I've found out ! What I've give for the books is all the money that was ever got out of a good many of the accounts in 'em. I'm fond of reading them account-books, though it did all happen so long ago. It's improving reading—it opens a man's eyes. Though to be sure, a man must be a born fool himself if the light of natur' didn't teach him that most folks is either rogues or fools, and the rest of 'em a little of both.'

'Some folks, p'r'aps, is a good bit of both, Snap,' was Mr Jones's satirical comment.

'Well, *you* ought to know about that, Jones,' was Mr Perkins's courteous retort.

'Anyhow,' rejoined Mr Jones, 'I don't believe in that

kind of talk now. When I hear a man makin' out that everybody else is a rogue or a fool, my belief is that he's measuring his neighbours' corn with his own two bushels.'

'I wasn't talking to you, Jones—I was talking to the parson. Speak when you're spoken to. Jones may say what he likes, but if there's no rogues nor fools in the world, who writes the letters I get hold of sometimes, and who reads 'em? Now here's a comical collection.'

So speaking, he took up a packet of lankily oblong epistles of the pre-penny postage time—many of them densely crossed. Some of them were splashed with sealing-wax 'kisses.'

'If there'd been more of 'em,' he said, as he scornfully turned the letters over with his pipe-stem, 'I'd have had the seals off before I bought them, for the wax weighs heavier than the paper, I should say; but they was only thrown in just to make up a lot I bought at a lawyer's. I suppose it was some breach of promise case. There's letters from the silly young girl, and from the chap that was spooney on her. He was tremendous spooney at first, but he gets sharp enough when he's had his will, and the silly young woman keeps on writing to him as if there wasn't such another lover in the world. "Only put a little more love into your letters," says she. "I know it is in your heart, and it is such a comfort to me, Arnold, to get kind words from you—the only kind words I care about now—for I am very lonely, and should be very sad if I did not look forward to our living together soon, oh, so happily! Be sure I will never injure you with your parents, my precious pet, but they don't see

your letters, so *please* make them more as you used to talk, my own sweet Arnold.' *My precious pet, my own sweet Arnold!*—and yet Jones says there ain't rogues and fools in the world. There's letters from the silly young woman's mother, and the chap's parents and relations, and all sorts of people. It's a queer kettle o' fish to be all put together in one bundle. I should like to know what the girl thinks of her chap now—if they're both of 'em alive. If she's got good damages—and she'd a right to 'em, I suppose—I'll be bound she didn't break her heart about her sweet Arnold. It's humbug all through, is life, whatever Jones may say—sometimes you humbugs, and sometimes you're humbugged.'

'And you think God created us for *that*?'

'I said nothing about being created, or what we was created for, what I say is that everything's humbug, more or less, and if it wasn't not exactly comfortable to think of what may happen to you when you tumble into the next world, if there *is* one, I often feel so sick of *this* that I should be glad to be out of it.'

'Well, if there *ain't* a next world, Snap,' moralized Mr Jones, 'I don't see that dying would do you much good. If you was just nothing at all, how could you tell that you *was* better off? And if there *is* a next world, according to your way of talking, you don't seem by any means sure that you'd get the good part of it, though you *are* too good for this world. It's bosh growling at the world your way. You try to make it a bit better instead of growling at it. There's plenty of room for improvement in it, I don't deny; but it's my belief, Snap, if you was to

try to *do* some of the improvement, you'd find you'd such a lot to do in your own self that you'd begin to doubt whether you was quite a proper judge about other folk's badness. Put that in your pipe, old boy, and smoke it. Good-night, Snap ; we'll be going now, sir, if it's convenient.'

So saying Mr Jones put on his hat and walked out of the room, and when I had bidden Mr Perkins good evening, I followed.

'I think I've given Snap a pill,' said Mr Jones when we got into the street, 'and I 'ope it'll do him good. You'll excuse me, sir, but you're a bit too mealy-mouthed with such as him. I know you was with me. Such chaps want to have the conceit knocked out of 'em. If you're civil to 'em, they think it's becoss they're so mighty clever that you're afraid to tackle 'em. You should let 'em see that other folks don't think they've half a quarter of the sense they're so proud on.'

XXIII.

MR JONES'S CUSTOMER.

THROUGH my acquaintance with Mr Jones, I became acquainted with a far more agreeable person to spend an hour with than Mr Perkins. I was in the bird-seller's 'Russian Herby' one evening, chatting with the old man, whilst Fred gravely got up his next day's lessons in a chair over which I had often seen him clambering in the days of poor Black Pete, when the bell hung on the shop-door tinkled, and a slim, sensible-looking man came in and knocked with his knuckles on the counter. The bell and the knocking so excited the noisy portion of Mr Jones's stock that I could not hear a word of the conversation which followed between him and his customer.

'That's a very decent feller,' said Mr Jones, when he came back, 'and used to make a very decent living. He's like most folks now, though, poor chap—'ard put to it ofen, and then he's a score and more of mouths to fill, whether he's got anything for his own or not.'

'You don't mean to say that the poor man has such a family as *that*!'

'Yes, I do, sir,' answered Mr Jones, laughing, 'and as well-behaved a family as you'd wish to see. It's a 'Appy Family—beasts and birds, you know, sir—and a good thing he used to make of it. I've heard him say that when he first started, he could clear his £2 or £3 a week easy, and now sometimes he don't take as much in a day as it costs him to feed his things. The chap that started them 'Appy Families, Crook says, minted money by his at first, but he was poor enough before he died. Partly the novelty was wore off, and then he'd been copied by so many.'

'But isn't it the same all round? Go where you will, you find that poor people haven't the pennies to spare they used to have.'

'That's the story everybody I come acrost tells me; though, mind you, sir, I don't believe all I hear about the lots they used to git. I've noticed that when things is taper with a chap, he gits a queer kind of pleasure out of tryin' to make folks believe that he was uncommon well off ever so long ago—or if *he* worn't somebody as belonged to him was.'

'Are you talking of your friend now?'

'No, he's a very worthy feller—a real *good* feller, I believe—and I think you'd, too, sir, if you knew him, though he ain't much of a church-goer. There's a verse he's very fond of quotin' out of a poetry-book he's got 'old of:—

“He prayeth best who loveth best
All things, both great and small;
For the dear God that loveth us,
He made and loveth all.”

He don't quote the lines about himself, but they fit him to a T. He's as fond of his things as if they was his own flesh and blood—a deal fonder than some folks is of *their* flesh and blood.'

'But is it only birds and beasts that he cares for?'

'No, man, woman, nor child he won't see put upon, if he can help it, quiet-spoken though he be. He's a natral leanin' to make friends with them of all sorts as wants a friend, and most folk's leanin', I'm afraid, is jest the other way. Friends is like flies for the most part—they go buzzin' in swarms wherever there's most to be got.'

Seeing that I dissented from his sweeping assertion, he went on—

'You needn't shake your 'ead at me, sir. Don't the Bible say, “men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself?” I should like you to know Crook, sir.'

'Does he come here often?'

'Every now and then he wants something in my way—seed, or a fresh bird, or so on—and so I git a chat with him. He's git some notions that you might think queer—about beasts and birds going to heaven, and such—and sometimes I'm half inclined to think he's right, though I do git up a kind of mild argeyment with him. “Crook,” says I one day, “can you show me a verse in the Bible that says they'll go to heaven?” “Mr Jones,”

says he, "can you show me a verse that says they *won't*?" "By-the-by," says I, "there *is* something about beasts in the Revelations." But Crook is a bit of a scholar, and a thorough honest feller. He wasn't going to take advantage of me. He told me that "beasts" wasn't the proper word to be used there. I should like you to know Crook, sir—he's very pleasant company.'

'Did he ever tell you how he trained his animals?'

'I've often talked to him about his secret, but he al'ays says that it's only patience and not being harsh to 'em. He ain't a joking man in a general way, but says he one day—he's a bachelor like myself—"I believe, Mr Jones, you might tame the worst wife that ever was, if you'd only be patient with her and kind to her—*lettin' her know at the same time that you was her master.*" I'm not so sure that Crook could manage a scolding wife—he'd be too soft-hearted for her, I fancy, but I don't doubt that that's his system with his Happy Family. It's a mystery to me, though, how he can manage such things so much better than me, that have lived all my life amongst 'em—though I'm fond of 'em, too. If he gits his living by 'em, so do I; and I've been at it almost since I can remember: now he didn't take to his present business till he was quite a man—I don't suppose he's been in the country a dozen times in his life; and the chap that started the 'Appy Families was a towney, too, he says—some kind of a weaver out Brummagem or Manchester way.'

'I should certainly like to see Mr Crook.'

'If you'd like to see him, sir, I'm sure he'd like to see

you, sir—'specially if you told him that I'd ast you to have the kindness to call. You'd git on well together. I won't offer to go with you, because I think you'd git on better by yourselves. He ain't like old Snap, sir—it would ha' been a sin to take you *there*, without lettin' you have some one with ye that wasn't too polite to growl back again at the old bear.'

'Is he in my parish?'

'Yes, Thompson Street, leading out of James Street, is where he lives—first house on the right as you go in, and the first door on the right as you go into the house. You'd better call latish, sir.'

I followed Mr Jones's advice when I paid my visit to Thompson Street, but found that Mr Crook was out. 'Wantin' to see Mr Crook, sir?' inquired the woman of the house, coming out of a back room, when I had knocked a second time at Mr Crook's door. 'He ain't come in yet, but I expect him in every minute. I've got his kittle bilin' for him. Will you come and set down in my place till he comes?—if you'll excuse the muddle I'm in, sir.'

Whilst I was sitting with his landlady, I heard more good opinions of Mr Crook. He was 'sich reg'lar pay,' and so 'quiet-behaved,' and so kind to everybody. 'I biles his kittle reg'lar for him,' said the woman. 'It saves him a bit o' coals, and then he can git his tea as soon as he likes, and he must want it, poor feller. I'm bound to do all I can for him as 'il do anythin' he can for me. Anythin' he can do, he will do, for anybody, if it comes to that.'

As it was clearly impossible to hear much about the lodger without hearing a great deal more about the landlady, I allowed her to speak on without interruption.

'I ain't 'zackly 'appy with my 'usband. Take him through and through, from year's end to year's end, and there's undreds of women wuss off than me, but still he's fond of drink, I can't deny, and when he's in his tantrums he thinks nothin' o' smashin' the furnitur', and wallopin' me with the back of a chair, or anythin' else that comes 'andy. He's a wery 'igh-sperrited man. He'd be wery sorry if he 'urt me, for he's wery fond of me in his 'eart, is Stubbs; but I should horfen be murdered if it wasn't for Mr Crook. Hout ~~he~~'ll come, and he'll quiet Stubbs down, though my 'usband could eat him, 'ead and all, like a shrimp, if he chose. And when there's rows in the house amongst the other lodgers, they'll mind Mr Crook, somehow, ten times more than they will Stubbs, or me either, though I'm screechin' my heyes out to git 'em to 'old their n'ise. It's queer,—and him that's sich a mite of a man, and don't speak much louder than a mouse. But he's a deal o' sperrit, in a quiet way, has M^r Crook, though you mightn't think it to look at him. Up he'll walk to big blackguards—I'm not speakin' o' Stubbs—at his wust nobody can say as Stubbs is a blackguard—but reg'lar bullyin' blackguards. Up Mr Crook 'ill walk to 'em as cool as a cowcumber, though I don't s'p'ose he ever give a man a black heye in all his born days, or 'ud know how if he'd got the chance. And then he's sich a kind chap. I'd a poor boy—he's gone now, thank God—that was a great burden to us. He'd 'urt his back, and couldn't do

nothin' when he come out of the hospital; he was a great trial to us—he was that peevish—let alone his not bein' able to do nothin' for hisself. But Mr Crook would come in of a night and a Sunday, and set with poor Tom, talkin' an' readin' by the hour together—and he'd bring him horanges. I do believe poor Tom loved Mr Crook better than his own father, or me either. A mother's 'eart, sir, can't 'elp feelin' soft to them as 'as been kind to her dead children, though p'r'aps she 'adn't much reason to be proud on 'em when they was alive. There he is, sir—I'll take him in his kittle, and tell him you're 'ere.'

When Mrs Stubbs came back, Mr Crook came with her. I gave him Mr Jones's *viva voce* introduction, and was instantly asked, with a good-humoured smile, to step into his room. A good part of it was filled up by the Happy Family cage that had been wheeled into it. The kettle stood upon the hob.

Perhaps you'll excuse me, sir,' said Mr Crook, 'if I make up a bit of a a fire before I begin to talk, to keep the kettle on the boil, and then, perhaps, you'll do me the honour to take a cup of tea with me. I let my fire go out when I leave in the morning.'

When the chips had been blown into a blaze, and the coals had caught, he put the kettle on them, and it soon began to bubble, hiss, puff, and fume as merrily as when Mrs Stubbs had taken it off her fire. In the mean time he had brought out a little black teapot, and a couple of blue and white cups and saucers, &c. When he had made tea, and put the pot on the hob to 'draw,' he said, 'And now, sir, if you'll excuse me, I'll look after my young

people. 'They want their suppers, and to go to bye-bye.'

The feathered and furred inmates of the cage were crowded about its door, jabbering, squeaking, grunting, croaking, and chirping very impatiently. As soon as Mr Crook approached them, however, they fell back, and then, when he had opened the door, hopped, and dropped, and flopped, and fluttered, and floundered out in single file. As soon as they were out they instantly made their way to the perches, and holes, and hutches which they had chosen for themselves, or their master had supplied them with, about his room. It wasn't exactly pleasant to feel two or three rats slipping between one's legs to a snug hollow by the fire-place. The cat marched up to the fender, stretched herself, gaped, mewed, as much as to say, 'I'm ready for my milk,' and then lay down in the firelight to wait for it. Some of the birds perched on the rail of their master's bed. The monkey shambled to the foot of the bed, threw back the clothes, jumped up, and tucked himself in, instantly untucking himself to put out his paw and jabber for his nightly rations. It was some time before all the animals had been served with their supper. When they had got it, the menagerie atmosphere—smells of mice and stale cabbage-leaves being the dominant tones of its malodour—was somewhat overpowering.

When Mr Crook came back to give me the cup of tea to which he had hospitably invited me, I did not feel much inclined for any refreshment except fresh air. 'Shall I open the window again, sir?' Mr Crook said anxiously, when he noticed my white face. 'I always leave it a bit

open when I go out, to keep the room as sweet as I can, but I forgot you weren't used to animals. Would you like to have a smoke, sir? If you haven't a cigar with you, I can get you a clean pipe in a minute. It won't hurt the youngsters—they like it. I smoke myself, and so does Mr Jones when he comes here, though he is used to animals, but his is a great deal airier place than mine. Do have a pipe, sir—I can assure you it won't annoy the youngsters. If I weren't to watch him, my monkey there would often be having a smoke. I've caught him taking a pipe, and downright he seemed to enjoy it. Have a smoke, sir, and the sickness will be gone in a second.' Not being a smoker, I was not so sure of that. I took a cup of tea instead, and when the window had been opened, gradually accustomed myself to my surroundings.

All the creatures had so thoroughly enjoyed their supper that I expressed my astonishment at creatures so sharp-set abstaining from the chances the cage afforded them of preying on their natural food. Mr Crook was a bit of a fanatic, in a harmless way. 'I'm not sure,' said he, 'that animals *are* animals' natural food—that is, when they are brought back to an upright state of nature. Teach them to love one another, and they won't eat one another; though I'll own that if I put a thing they haven't been taught to love into the cage, they'll be down upon him fast enough.'

'Isn't that natural instinct asserting itself?'

'In my belief, it's rather half-mastered depravity cropping up again. I don't give my youngsters what you call their natural food. My principle is this—not to eat or

drink anything that costs any animal its life, or pain, and I bring up my youngsters in the same way of thinking. We're almost vegetarians. Of course we drink milk, and eat cheese and butter, but then it's no pain to a cow to be milked, but a relief instead. What does the great poet, Wordsworth, tell us? "Never to mix our pleasure or our pride with suffering of the meanest thing that breathes."

'But he says, too, Mr Crook,—

"And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes."

So why do you boil cauliflowers, instead of letting them go on enjoying the air they breathe?'

'I don't like to argue with a clergyman, sir, but it seems to me that *that* is quite different. A vegetable's breath isn't like an animal's. That was a poetical fancy of Wordsworth's, I'm inclined to think. We read in the Bible that we may eat freely of every tree and green herb.'

'But we read in the Bible also, "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you."'

'Yes, sir; but go on with the verse, if I may make so bold.'

"——even as the green herb have I given you all things." What do you say to that, Mr Crook?'

'I hope you won't think me forward, sir. It seems impudent in a man like me to dispute about the meaning of the Bible with a clergyman that has spent I don't know how many years in studying it in the original tongues at college.' [No satire was intended, but, remembering the profundity of my Biblical research at Cambridge, I

could not help feeling severely lashed, 'for self and university.'] 'I don't like to seem forward, but I don't take that text as you do, sir. The meaning I should give to it is this,—You don't take any animal life away when you eat a vegetable, and so long as you remember that, you may eat what animals will give you. I'm doubtful about eggs. The chances of life are out of them long before they get to the shop, but still if they'd been properly hatched they'd have been chickens. So I don't eat them myself. I'll confess, though, I've given chopped-up hard-boiled egg to my birds, and they relished it, but that's not their sin, but mine for giving it to them. I wasn't always a vegetarian, and I feel frightened when I think of the animals I have helped to eat. If God, as the Bible goes on to say, will require the blood of our lives at the hand of every beast, of course he will require the blood of the life of every beast at our hand. We're on an equality so far, it seems to me.'

A craze of this kind was too amiable to wrangle over. 'Well, well, Mr Crook,' I said, 'I will leave you to think as you like about Noah's time; but farther on in the Bible, you know, there are orders about the slaughtering of birds and beasts, and farther back, you know, Abel brought the firstlings of his flock for an offering, and they were accepted when Cain's fruit of the ground found no favour.'

'I can't believe, sir, that Abel *killed* his lambs. Mightn't he have set them apart, called them God's lambs, and made special pets of them, till God took them back to himself?'

'Ah, Mr Jones told me that you believed beasts had a hereafter.'

'I do, sir, and a happy hereafter ; because I believe in God. He wouldn't have created things to suffer for no fault of their own, and then not make it up to them ten times over somewhere. I needn't tell you, sir, that God means good. And would *that* be good ?'

By this time, to use a slang phrase, I had taken Mr Crook's measure, and felt no inclination to controvert anything he might say ; merely wishing to get him to manifest his idiosyncrasy as openly as possible.

'Well, but, Mr Crook,' I asked, 'what about the beasts and birds that were ordered to be slain ?'

'It's a mystery to me, sir,' he answered, 'that God should give in to the hardness of men's hearts. But we've Christ's word for it that He did—any way, that He let Moses say so in his name. It's a mystery, sir—that's my answer to your question. But what a deal of kindness to animals there is in the Bible—about the sparrows not falling to the ground, and God feeding the young ravens when they cry, and looking after your enemy's ox, and not muzzling your own when he treadeth out the corn ! Don't you think there was a Happy Family in the Garden of Eden, sir ? Adam didn't stick the young lambs when they ran up to rub their little noses against his legs, and skin them, and give them to Eve to roast. And if the devil did get inside the serpent and leave his venom in him, it won't be always so. Some snakes have worked the poison off already ; and don't we read that 'the sucking-child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall

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put his hand on the cockatrice' den?" And what does the Prophet Isaiah say just before?"—"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like an ox." What's that, sir, but a Happy Family?—as things were before sin came into the world, and as they'll be again when it's washed out of it? Learned folks say that the lion could not eat straw, but there, you see, he will. They'd say that mice is my cat's natural food, but she lets them run all over her, and nibble for fun at her tail, without ever thinking of hurting them.'

'And you think, Mr Crook, that animals might be educated into millennial peace?'

'I really think they might, sir, if men would take the pains, and set them a better example. So far as eating one another goes, look at mine, sir. I've a hawk, and an owl, and a crow, and a monkey, and a cat, and I used to have a dog, and a coatimundi, and I've a jackdaw, and a jay, and a starling, and a couple of pigeons, and a bantam cock and hen, and a magpie, and rats, and rabbits, and ferrets, and mice, and three guinea-pigs, and sparrows, and a hedgehog; and they'd starve before one of them would make a meal of another.'

'Have you ever tried them?'

'Well, no, of course, I wouldn't be so cruel. But I've let them go long enough without food, to be sure I'm only saying what's correct. Why, just look behind you,

sir—the rats and the ferrets have gone to sleep together cuddled up in a heap, and my cat here suckled some of those rats. You'll read of cats doing that, too, in natural-history books. So you see sometimes, without being trained, they can get the better of what you call their natural instinct. I mentioned that to Mr Jones once, but he said it was only because the cat wanted to relieve herself, or because she was fattening up the young rats as a farmer fats bullocks; but that seems a low view to take—and I fancy it's only Mr Jones's joke, for he's very fond of animals, and has tamed that rat of his in a surprising manner considering that he never gave any particular thought to the subject.'

'It seems to be your belief that animals are very much like men.'

'Yes, I believe they might all be brought to a proper way of thinking and feeling if they'd proper pains taken with them. I'd a deal of trouble with the hawk I've got at present, but now he'll let the sparrows take the food right out of his beak, and never say a word.'

'You haven't cured your young friends of stealing, then?'

'Well, sir, you know men have very different opinions on the subject of property. There's a Frenchman, I've read in the papers, thinks it's robbery; and that may be the sparrows' opinion, when they see the hawk eating something they'd like to have. It's the hawk, you see, sir, they may think the thief. But now you mention it, I'll own that it doesn't seem pretty of the sparrows to take the hawk's food away just because they know he

won't hurt them. My system falls short a long way of what I want it to do ; but that's my fault and not the animals'. If the teacher was a bit nearer perfection himself, why, then, perhaps, he'd have a better right to grumble that his scholars weren't. My crow, I'm sorry to say, is very spiteful still, and very deceitful. He'll give his neighbour a nasty dig, and then look away as innocent and as sleepy as an old Quaker gentleman twiddling his thumbs. The magpie, too, is very fond of scaring anything that will let itself be bullied ; and the monkey is an awful tease. He'll shake the owl off its perch when its dozing, and pinch the cat, and take a mouse up by the tail, and swing it round and round like a sling. And yet there's a deal of goodness in Jacko. He'll drive the magpie off when it's bullying, and if he takes a fancy to a little thing, he'll toss it and hug it and feed it like a mother.'

Seeing me smiling, he observed, 'You may well laugh, sir, and think me weak-minded, but there's another thing I'll tell you about Jacko. I've read that man is the only creature on earth that has got reason and a notion of God. I'm by no means sure of that—I fancy it's a bit of our conceit.' If we *are* the only creatures on earth that have got them, a very poor use a good many of us make of them, at any rate.'

'Do you believe that animals have reasoning faculties, then?'

'I can't believe that they haven't. I've seen my things think a matter out as sensibly as any man could do. I dare say you know the story of the dog that lost his

master, and scented him to a place where three roads met; up two of them he ran snuffing, but when he came back, he galloped along the third without putting his nose to the ground. Wasn't that reason, sir?—and I've seen my youngsters do things every bit as sensible as that.'

'And I suppose you believe, too, that animals know that God made them.'

'He's made a lot more of them than He has of us, and so I can't see why we should fancy that we are the only ones that He has let know who made them. They've as much right to call themselves His creatures as we have, and what right have we to say that He hasn't let them know it? When I wake up in the summer mornings, and hear my sparrows chirping in their cage, and the sparrows chirping up above on the roof, it seems to me as if they were singing their morning hymn—having family prayers in their little way. And they twitter in the same way, only quieter, just before they go to sleep. Hear a lark, too, sing in the morning!—the man on the first-floor up above has got one that he hangs outside his window when the weather's fine—isn't *that* a morning hymn? Could the singers in surplices at the Temple Church beat *that*, sweet as it is to hear them?'

'I have not the least doubt, Mr Crook, that it *is* a morning hymn, and I am inclined to think with you that the lark must be in some way conscious that it is so—but you were going to tell me something about Jacko.'

'Well, sir, it was this. Whenever Jacko happens to wake up when I'm going to bed, and sees me saying my

prayers, out he jumps, and kneels down by me, and puts his paws together like a child, and moves his lips like mine. At first I thought it was only funny imitation, but he tires of most of his tricks in that way after a bit, and he keeps on at this. You may smile, sir—I expected you would—but it's my belief that Jacko has got it into his head that, since he can do so many things that men do, he would like to worship God in their way instead of the way he's been accustomed to. I can't say what that was, but I know that Jacko, when he's at prayers—comical though he is at most times,—looks serious enough to shame a good many church-goers. If he *doesn't* mean what he's doing, he *shams* to far better than a good many men and women do. I was saying so to Mr Jones one day.'

'And what did Mr Jones say?

"Don't get into that way of talking, Crook. I've given it up, and I don't want you to fall into it. There's no comfort to be got out of it." But then Mr Jones, sensible as he is, isn't always consistent. Directly afterwards he burst out laughing. "You've hit it, Crook," he said. "Most people, I believe, do get up and down at church exactly like your monkey; only they can't sham as well, or they won't take the trouble to." But that, I need not tell you, sir, wasn't my point of view. I don't think that Jacko does sham. He only thinks that he has found out a better mode.'

If Mr Crook had had any money to leave, any one to whom he had willed it would, no doubt, have felt very anxious, had the legatee heard him propounding such

opinions. For my own part, in spite of his craze, I felt a hearty respect for him.

‘If all people thought like you, Mr Crook,’ I said to him, when I was bidding him good-bye, ‘there would be no need of a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; but are you quite sure that your animals would not be happier out of your cage than they are in it?’

‘I’ve thought that matter over seriously, sir, and I don’t think they would. It isn’t that I get my living by them. It isn’t much of a living nowadays, and there are other things that I could do that would bring me in, at any rate, as much as I get by my cage. But I don’t think they *would* be better off, if I was to let them go. They’d be quite unfit for the ways of the world from which I’ve partly weaned them. They’d starve or get killed. Some of them, perhaps, would backslide into their old ways, and that would be worse almost. No, sir, I’ll keep my youngsters as long as I’ve food to give them. I feel like a preacher, too, when I wheel my Family out. There’s two texts to that sermon—“One God and Father of us all,” and “God is Love.”’

XXIV.

A BLACK MISSIONARY TO THE BLACKS.

UNLESS you are Lucretianly selfish enough to feel your own comfort heightened by others' sufferings, it is like a draught of icy wind rushing into the warm bed to be awoke at five o'clock on a winter's morning by a ponderous single knock, followed by a hoarsely shrill shout of 'swee-weep !' The stars shine with a cold, steel-like brilliance between the snow-furred chimney-pots over the way. You hear the black familiar in waiting tramping up and down on the ice-glazed, snow-caked pavement, coughing, clapping his hands on his breast, blowing on his fingers, and ever and anon repeating his knock and cry to hurry the sleepy, miserable maiden who has to let him in. She huddles on her clothes, a blink of candle-light glances into your bedroom as she slips past on her way to the drear, chill under-regions. The sound of the undoing of a door is heard, and presently a rumbling in the chimney ; and listening,

you wonder, just before you drop off to sleep again, which feels the more wretched—the working sweep, or the watching servant.

It chanced one winter morning that the maiden commissioned to let the sweep into my humble establishment proved deaf to his knockings and shouts, and my staff of servants being as modest as my house, there was no fellow-servant to rouse her. Accordingly I had to go down to let the man in. Kicking the snow off his boots, he clumped up the steps, when I opened the door.

‘Hoverslep’ yourself, eh, Mary?’ he said in a cheery tone, as he came in. ‘I don’t wonder at it. I should ha’ liked to sleep a bit longer such a mornin’ as this. Law, sir, I beg your pardon, I’d no notion it was you. You’ll ketch your death o’ cold standin’ shiverin’ there without your stockins. You go up to bed agin. I’ll bang the door arter me when I’ve done. I shan’t steal nothin’,’ he added with a smile. ‘I see you every Sunday at church, sir; but I’ve got a cleaner face then than I have now.’

There was such an honest ring in the old man’s voice, that even if I had possessed anything within his reach worth stealing, I should have trusted him. I was glad enough to jump into my warm bed again, but as I did so, I felt ashamed of myself. A younger man somehow feels *little* when he sees an old man cheerfully doing work and bearing hardship—whatever they may be—that he would shrink from. And besides that, I felt ashamed that the sweep should know me well as his clergyman, whilst I knew nothing of him as a parishioner beyond

what his red-tape-bound card hung up in the kitchen told me. From that I had learnt that he beat carpets as well as swept chimneys, and in both capacities, I believed; my maiden had employed him to her satisfaction; but I had never thought of the chimney-sweeper and carpet-beater as a fellow Christian, and large as was the parish in which I then laboured, I felt that I could not excuse myself. He had been often in my house, he came regularly to church; and yet, until I happened to have to let him into my house, I had taken as much or as little human interest in his brush, as I had in its wielder.

After this I soon made his acquaintance. His little house certainly was not free from the stifling scent of soot, but his wife who let me in, the little passage into which I stepped, and the little parlour into which I was shown, were all startlingly clean. There being no fire in the prim little parlour, I asked leave to sit in the kitchen; and that, too, though a good deal more comfortable, was almost as clean.

'Sam'l will be in directly, sir, he's cleanin' hisself. An' p'r'aps you'll be so good as to hexcuse me, sir, I was jest a-goin' out when you knocked. I'll tell Sam'l to 'urry hisself.' So spake the sweep's wife as she left the room, and presently 'Sam'l' entered in decent clean clothes, and with a face that shone from yellow soap and friction, although a fringe of black cloud still lingered, so to speak, on its horizon.

'Your house is very different, Mr Craske, from what I had fancied,' I said with a laugh. 'I had got a notion that I should be ankle-deep in soot.'

'You'd be a good bit over that, sir, if you was to step across into the outhouse, but I like to have my own place tidy, and so does my old woman. It ain't that I was brought up to such ways, for a sut-bag was the only bed I had when I was 'prentice. There's sweeps' houses still, too, where you might find a lot o' sut hinside—whole nests o' sweeps and sweeps' women that scarce gives themselves a wash from year's hend to year's hend. There they huddles together and squabbles together, jest like pigs aboard a Hirish packet, till the walls is as black as the chimbley.'

'How do *you* manage to keep your place so clean?'

'Well, you see, sir, I've got a side-way to my backyard, and that's a 'elp. And then I've got a good wife, instid o' keepin' a drunken woman, an' gittin' drunk along wi' her, an' pitchin' into her, and her pitchin' into me. We respect each other, and that 'elps us to respect ourselves. And we've both got right notions, I 'ope, about things in your line, sir, and that's another 'elp. Cleanliness is next to godliness, they say, but in my way o' life it's the t'other way, I think. It wasn't till I took a serious turn that I cared about cleanin' myself. Of a Saturday night I takes a warm bath over there in Vitechap'l, and I takes my Sunday things with me, and when I've got my clean shirt on, I feels as if Sunday was begun.'

'You don't look much like a chimney-sweep *now*, Mr Craske.'

'Oh, I allus gives myself a good sluice every night when my work is done, and changes my clothes. But that ain't like Saturday's wash. I enjoy my meals twice

as much a-Sundays as other days. If I could manage it, I'd put off my grubbin' till I'd cleaned myself at night, but I'm too sharp-set for that.'

'And how do you spend your evenings?'

Oh, my old gal's good company. We talks, and I spell her a bit out o' the paper, and reads her a chapter, or a good book, and so on. And then——'

Mr Craske stopped suddenly.

'Well, Mr Craske, and then?'

'Why, you see, sir, I don't like to talk as if I was braggin', but I'm a bit of a public charácter of an evenin','

he answered with a grin.

'In what way?'

'Why, you see, sir, I'm a Total Absterainer, and so's my old gal. Not that I'd want her to be, if she didn't like it, for she never took enough to 'urt her, but I used to be a hawful lushington. There's lots of sweeps is still, and a missionary that goes about amongst 'em, and is a teetotaller hisself, says to me one day, "I can't do anythin' with them—they won't listen to me, or if they do, it's only to chaff me afterwards; but if *you* was to speak to 'em, Craske, p'r'aps they might mind you more. You know what a good thing Total Abstinence has been to you," says he, "and it's your duty to try to make your fellow-tradesmen see the benefit of it." Well, sir, he borrered a room, and he got me to let him give out amongst 'em that a sweep wos goin' to talk to sweeps in it. "A Talk with Sweeps *by* a Sweep" was what he put on the little bills he got printed. A lot of 'em came for the fun of the thing, and rare game they made of me at

first, for I was wery shame-faced at startin'. But I got my pluck an' my woice as I went on, and before I'd finished they was quiet enough, and most of 'em looked friendly when I'd done. Some of 'em came up to thank me, and I'd another talk with *them*. Since then, when I've time, I've gone about of a evening among 'em, trying to git 'em to give up their lushing and save their money, and live decenter, and remember there's a world where there's no sut, and another place where there must be a dreadful lot on it: "an' *that* chimbley never gits swep'," I says to them, "becos they never lets the fire out there." Some of 'em cuts up rough, and offers to fight me for a pot, an' the women offen is wery himpident, poor creaturs. I can't say I've done much good, but I've done some, thank God. It seems presumsheous in the likes of me settin' up for a sort o' parson, but it worn't my own thought at startin', and now you see, sir—knowin' the ways of the trade and so on—I've found out that I can git along with some of 'em, p'r'aps, better than a reg'lar parson could. He'd know a million times more than me, but then he wouldn't jest know the ways o' sweeps; and so I 'ope you'll excuse me, sir.'

'I ought rather to ask you to excuse me, Mr Craske. I ought to have known you long ago, and the people you visit too. You may be sure, though, that I shall not interfere with you—even if I had the power, or the right, I should not have the will. From what you tell me, I should say that you were just the man to do them good.'

'Oh, sir, I 'ope you don't think I've been crackin' myself up that way. It's jest this. If I hadn't gone amongst

'em, there was no one they could 'ear a good word from. They was like sheep without a shepherd—and precious black sheep, too, hinside as well as out.'

'Just the kind *our* Shepherd came to seek and to save. Try to talk to them as much like Him as you can, Mr Craske. I mean, don't trust only to *scaring* them. I've no doubt that they need a good deal of scaring. When a man is lying dead drunk in a house on fire, it's a kindness to give him a good shaking. But I have not much faith in mere frightening. If a man only gives up his sins because he is afraid of hell-fire, he is very apt to fall into them again. You know, we don't think much of a man's honesty when it is only the fear of being taken up that keeps him from stealing. Talk to them about the holiness and love of God.' I don't mean as if you were preaching them a sermon; but tell them bits out of Jesus's life, just as if you were telling them stories. They will be fresh enough to them, poor fellows, and when they hear them, they will understand what you *mean* by God's holiness and love. Leading is generally better than driving.'

'I partly see what *you* mean, sir. You think I've too much bark, like a young drover's dog, and so I do more 'arm than good—only drive 'em up into a muddle like.'

'Indeed, I mean no such thing.'

'Well, sir, whether you do or whether you don't, I can see there's sense in it, and I'll bear your words in mind.'

In the course of our conversation, I learnt the history of this brother of the cloth.

He thought that Craske was not his right name. His

first master's name was Craske, and he was sure that *he* was not his father. He had no idea who his parents were, or where he was born ; but he fancied that it must have been in the country, from a few little things he remembered, and because the first time his master took him into the country, it didn't seem strange to him.

' I rec'llect there was a old finger-post in the middle of a bit of green, with a bit of the board broken off, and a moke standin' under it, and a sow rubbin' herself agin it, and it all seemed as I'd seen the wery same things the week before, though I know I'd never been out o' London before, since master had had me. What I remember of the country when I was a kid was what I've told you, sir, and a lane with the 'edges meetin' almost atop, and a big woman with a red face and a black eye ; but I'm sure *she* worn't my mother from the way I think of her. And then I remember blubberin' and gittin' a hidin' in a little room full of smoke, and a crack in the wall above the mantel-shelf. It worn't the woman that hided me—I can remember that ; but who it was, I *don't* remember. And then I rec'llect nothin' till I was lyin' atop of the sut-sacks in my master's shed, feelin' hawful scared and cold, and blubberin' becos I'd had another hidin' an' hadn't had nothin' to eat. The tramps used to kidnap country children in them days—boys and gals both—and sell 'em to the sweeps, and I've no doubt that's how it was with me. My master was a Tartar, but I expec' he worn't much worse than the rest. He didn't grudge me my grub when I got to be of use, but he was wery fond of hidin' me, with or without a cause. The missis was a

bit kinder, but it was heasy to be that, and when she was on the lush, she'd hit out at me with the poker or the rollin'-pin, or anythin' else that come to 'and first—sometimes it was the fender—she was noways partic'lar, poor old woman.

'I remember the first time I ever climbed. I must ha' been goin' on for six then, I s'pose ; but some was put to it as young as four—yes, sir, little gals as well as boys. My master had two boys as well as me—older than me—and they used to wallop me, too, and tell me all sorts o' flesh-creepin' stories about the chimbleys—lads stickin' in 'em, and bein' dug out with the flesh all burnt off their bones, and so on. It wasn't pleasant to 'ear sich tales of a night, layin' there in that shed that was as black as pitch. And there was *truth* in them stories, too ; though, of course, the t'other boys made 'em out as bad as they could. Anyways, I was hawful scared when master first told me to go up a chimbley. He leathered me, but I caught 'old of his legs, and begged and prayed of him not to force me. But up he shoves me, and when I didn't go on, he set some stror alight in the grate, and that druv me up sharp enough. And then another of the lads was sent up arter me, to give me a prod with a pin when I turned faint-hearted. In the sole of my fut he druv it in, or the fleshy part of my leg—though my legs hadn't much flesh on them in them days. I was three-parts naked, and my knees and elbers was sore for months arterwards—the sut, you see, got in, and the sores wouldn't 'eal, but I'd to go up all the same. Yes, sometimes the servants pitied me

like, but if they give me a penny, my master or his man allus took it.

‘The masters and the journeymen, too, took best part of what we got on May Day. The masters said it was for our clothes, but I don’t think my clothing could ha’ cost *my* master much. Whenever we got any coppers, if the journeymen couldn’t bounce us out of ’em, they’d chisel us out of ’em—at gambling, sir. And then it was the servants who was most set agin the machines. They *would* have the boys. The machines was inwented, bless you, sir, years and years before climbing was put down by Hact o’ Parli’ment, and there was climbing boys long arter they was supposed to be put down. The servants said the new things didn’t sweep the flues half as well as the boys did—and there’s some truth in that. You sêe, sir, our scramblin’ up an’ down rubbed off more sut than a machine will, and then we could git our brushes into ’oles and corners a machine can’t reach. But it was a ’orrid life to set a child to.

‘Some folks say that the world’s as bad as ever it was, but I can’t believe that, or where would ha’ been the use of Christ a’-comin’ to it, and sufferin’ what He did for nothin’? I’ve no doubt there’s improvements, and puttin’ down the climbin’ was one of ’em. Let alone the boys bein’ brought up like little ’eathens, and the life they led, there was all kinds of illnesses they ran the risk on. P’raps you may have ’eard, sir, that there’s a cancer next to nobody ever had but chimbley-sweepers. It was a ’orrid life. You can git used to most things, and I got used to that, but I never felt jolly like, ’cept when I was out of a May Day’;

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and there was a dinner use to be given becos a swell kid had been stole for a chimbley-sweep, and his mother found him out becos he'd been sent to a swell place, and crawled into bed, brush and all, jest as if he was used to it. I used to like the tuck-in, but *didn't* I wish sometimes that a swell lady would come along and say, "That's *my* kid—you come 'ome with me, Sam'l."

'Arter I got too big for climbin', I did odd jobs here and there, now for this master and now for that. It was a poor life, and a wicked one too. I'd learnt to drink, and swear, and fight, and gamble, and do all kinds of wickedness, jest as if I'd been a man. I couldn't read then, and I s'pose I'd never been inside a church or chapel in my life. I think, though, that I must ha' been taught to say my prayers, becos, when I was quite a little kid, I used to kneel down by the sut-sacks, and say a bit of "Our Father"—I didn't know all on it. I'd no clear notion what it meant, but somehow I didn't feel so lonely when I said it. It's wery lonesome for a little kid not to have nobody as belongs to him. I've got a notion that p'r'aps them as was brought up like me, when they gits to know they've a Father in Heaven, vallyies Him more than them that has had fathers and mothers to look arter 'em. But I was soon laughed out o' sayin' my prayers, when the t'other lads saw what I was up to, and a real bad boy I turned out.

'When I got a bit older, I'd journeyman's wages. They wasn't much, but then I'd my bed and my board and my perkisits—but it all went the same way. Wuss and wuss I got. A man *must* ha' been a blackguard for sweeps

to think him bad, in them days—and I'm afraid things isn't much altered now, so far as that goes—but even amongst my mates I'd a name for bein' an out-and-outer. *Perkisits?* Oh, that's the money you git for measurin' the sut for your master, and puttin' out chimneys a-fire, and the beer money the servants give you, and such like, sir. It's astonishin' what things people will pride themselves on. I'd got to be wery wentursome as well as wicked, and I don't know which I was the prouder on. But my pride was to have a fall. I fell into an airey, and a lucky fall it was for me. Instid of tumbling straight into hell, as I expected I should as I shot down, I tumbled into the kingdom of heaven. I'd been carryin' on on a roof, as usual, half drunk, as usual. I was runnin' along a ridge like a rope-dancer when I overbalanced myself, and down I come clatterin' over the tiles. There worn't no prarripet to bring me up, so over I went, as I was tellin' ye. I was a bag of broken bones when they picked me up, and months and months I laid in horsespittle. But I was cured at last, and I'd had somebody to see me that had done me more good than all the doctors even.

'There was a kind old lady come to see me, sometimes twice a week. She lived opposite the house I fell off, and she'd seen me tumble. It was her that got me to give up drink, and taught me about Jesus. And she looked arter me, too, when I came out to see that I didn't fall back into bad ways. The kind old lady had me to her house in the evenin', and larnt me my letters. It was then, you see, sir, I got into the 'abit of givin' myself a sluice. When I'd saved up a bit of my earnin's, the old lady lent me a little

money, and recommended me to her friends ; so I bought a machine and a few sticks, and started for myself. As soon's ever I'd saved up the money the old lady had lent me, I took it back to her. I 'oped she'd take it back, but I was 'alf afraid she wouldn't. But she did, and writ me out a receipt for it, though she never axed for one. "Quite right, my good man," says she, when she'd counted it out. "It would not be a kindness to give you this money, because now you can earn money for yourself, and so I can lend this to some one else to help him to do the same."


'Soon arter that I married my old woman—she was kitchen maid in one of the houses I went to—and neither on us, I 'ope, has had reason to repent it. Sometimes I can keep a man, and sometimes I can't, but we've allus had a livin'.

'Cripps was the name of the lady who give me my start for the next world and this too. I got a suit o' black, and went to the church when she was buried, dear good soul. If I'd ever had a babby—boy or gal—I should ha' called it Cripps, though Cripps Craske might ha' had a rummy sort o' sound. She worn't only so good, she was so sensible. Says she to me one day, "What do you do with your soot, Mr Craske?" (*Soot, she* called it, so I s'pose that's right, but in the trade we mostly calls it *sut*.) "Well, ma'am," says I, "I sells it to them as sells it agin, but I believe at last the farmers gits it for their corn." "There, Mr Craske," says she, "think of that! The black soot helps to make the beautiful green corn grow, that gives us the sweet white bread. Think of that!" She meant it for a kind of parable like, like them in the

Testament, but I didn't twig what she meant at first, so I axed her. "Why," she says, "you mustn't think because you're a chimney-sweep that you can't do any more good to other people than sweeping their chimneys, and paying your debts with the money you get for doing it." Well, sir, I *did* think, offen and offen, of what Mrs Cripps had said to me, and that made me the readier to try to do my best when the missionary spoke to me about goin' about among the sweeps.'

XXV.

IMAGINATIVE MATTHEY.

NE day when I called upon Mr Jones I found him examining a boxful of still semi-torpid tortoises which he had just bought. It looked a queer consignment, and I expressed my doubts as to its proving a profitable speculation.

‘Never fear, sir,’ said Mr Jones. ‘Have you any idea, sir, o’ ’ow many o’ them queer critturs git sold in London every year?’ I’ll be bound you hain’t. Well, it’s a good bit nigher twenty thousand than ten, and I hain’t got more than five dozen. I’ll keep a dozen to sell over the counter, and the rest I’ve got for a friend o’ mine as sells ’em in the street. He’ll take ’em of me a dozen at a time as he can work ’em off.’

‘Why doesn’t he buy them where you do, and so save your profit?’

‘Bless you, sir, I don’t screw a profit out of him. Matthey’s a friend of mine, and so I try to ’commodate

him a bit. I buy the things of a Jew in the Minorities. He gits 'em sent him by his brother as lives in Marocky. They don't cost much for carriage nor for keep, becos they're sound asleep, you see, and so they come as ballast. Well, if Matthey wa's to go to Cohen for a dozen, he'd charge him, say, five bob ; but me buyin' alf a gross or so at a time, Cohen 'ill let me 'ave 'em for a trifle less, and then I let Matthey 'ave 'em, as he wants 'em, at cost price.'

'And how do they sell retail?'

'Well, for those I sells myself I gits prices accordin' to my customer, and the looks an' liveliness o' the queer critturs. At the best o' times they ain't never overburdened with spirits. The chaps in the streets, I s'pose, gits from a tanner to a bob a-piece—may'ap 'alf-a-bull for a whopper. There was one chap, I know—anyways he said so—got that for a dead un, becos it was a big un. He gammoned the party that bought it into believin' that the longer a tortus was in comin' to life agin, the longer it 'ud live, an' the livelier it 'ud be, when it did come to life agin.'

'I hope that wasn't your friend.'

'No, that worn't Matthey. He'd be above cheatin' like that. Ketch *him* sellin' a dead thing for a live un ! and yet I never come acrost a chap with sich a imagination.'

'How?'

'Why, you see, sir, when he's yarnin', you can't believe more than about 'alf o' what he says, and you're puzzled which 'alf to choose. Still, it's interestin' conversation—like a child's story-book, you understand. There ain't no 'arm in Matthey's make-ups, and he tells 'em so nateral

that it seems as if there must be truth in 'em some'ow. He goes shell-sellin', too—ever so far into the country, and nice yarns, I'll be bound to say, he spins the yokels about his shells. He's a merry-'earted, amusin' feller, is Matthey.'

'But, Mr Jones, according to your own account, does not your merry-hearted, amusing friend—tell lies?'

'Oh, sir, you don't understand me. Matthey don't tell *mean* lies. When he says he'll do a thing, he does it, and so on. He'll git them tortuses on tick, and the money 'ill be as safe as if it was in my till. But he's as good-natur'd a chap as I know, an' he was born with a imagination, an' so he can't 'elp spinnin' folks yarns, you see.'

'What does he spin them about?'

'He'll look up at the clouds, an' see all kind o' things in 'em as I can't—he'd make up a 'ist'ry about the coal-scuttle and the fender and the fire-irons. He can't 'elp it, sir. Matthey's lies ain't like other folks', if you must call 'em lies. He don't lie to better hisself. He's a deal too soft-'earted for that. He's often let in—leastways he lets hisself be let in—for though he do spin yarns, he can see through 'em sharp enough. But he's soft-'earted.'

'And so he's taken advantage of, I suppose.'

'Yes, and he gits laughed at when his back's turned. Folks says that his garret's to let empty, but he's got a precious sight more sense in his 'ead than they'd have if they was to live to be Methusilies. It ain't the 'ead, it's the 'art that's soft in Matthey. But Matthey ain't a cheat—only when he cheats hisself. He don't gammon his customers to ge' 'em to buy of him. I'll be bound to say that he often takes less than another man would, but

it's his good natur' that makes him give the yarns in, you see. The folks that buys of 'im pays no more than if they'd bought from a chap as 'adn't got a imagination, and yet they thinks a deal more of their penn'orth.'

'But, Mr Jones——'

'I won't say it's exactly right—still I can't see that it does much 'arm. When a chap advertises a thing that ain't worth a penny as if it was worth a crown, and gits a crown for it, *that's* cheatin', and no mistake about it. But if a chap don't want to git more than a penny for what other folks sell for a penny, and yet has got the knack of makin' them as buys of him think that it's worth a precious sight more than a crown when they've bought it for a penny—I s'pose *that's* cheatin' too, but it's a very diff'rent kind o' cheatin' to my thinkin'. He's only took their penny, and yet he's made 'em a present of all their fine fancies. Don't he seem a kind o' vlantrofigist?'

'But, after all, he only makes people happy by making them believe what isn't fact.'

'Well, sir, and—bar sacred matters that don't depend upon your fancy—ain't a good part of what's called 'appiness made up of fancyin' things diff'rent from what they are? You ain't a bumptious man, sir—quite the contrary—sometimes I wish you *would* crow and strut a bit; and yet I'll be bound to say that even you fancy your neighbours think a deal more of you than they do, sir. Perhaps, you wouldn't like to hear all that *is* said about you—no great 'arm, but still not exactly the kind o' thing a man likes to hear said of hisself. I ain't goin' to tell you, sir, what it is, I'll leave you to be 'appy in your fancy o' your-

self. And Matthey gives people that couldn't make up fancies—I don't mean about themselves—most on us can do *that*—but about other things; Matthey gives 'em pretty fancies about the things he sells 'em. I let you keep your pretty opinion, and he gives 'em pretty opinions—that's all the difference, and it ain't much—'cep' that he's cleverer than me. He makes up pretty fancies, and I've let out what I oughtn't to let out, if I wanted to do what I said.'

Mr Jones's casuistry, I certainly could not help thinking, had been by no means complimentary to myself. I was foolish enough to be ruffled. 'Your defence of your merry-hearted, amusing, mendacious friend, Mr Jones,' I remarked, with would-be satirical *hauteur*, 'simply amounts to this—that if he tells clever positive lies, you try to tell negative lies, but are too clumsy to tell them adroitly. If you told them ever so cleverly, would *your* doing wrong, Mr Jones, *necessarily* be a justification of other people's wrong-doing in the same way?'

'Don't *you* cut up rough, sir,' cried astonished Mr Jones, struggling hard to smother a grin. 'I like to see you standing up for yourself a bit, and yet some'ows I don't. I meant no 'arm, and won't say any more about the man—'cep this, that I don't believe he means no 'arm neither, and that you wouldn't think so neither, sir—not if you knew him.'

Just then Matthey happened to come in to inquire about his tortoises. I felt a little prejudiced against him, but his genial face soon dispersed the prejudice as the sun scatters the mist that vainly strives to dim it. He was a

brown, black-haired, sailor-like, middle-aged man, with a set of white teeth that seemed to shed sunlight when he smiled—and that was every other minute.

‘Here’s a gen’leman I’ve been tellin’ about ye, Matthey,’ said Mr Jones. ‘He’s a queer likin’ for good-for-nothin’, idle fellers like you. There, you go into my parlour, and give an account of yourself, and don’t give no more scope to your imagination than you can ’elp, Matthey.’

Matthey grinned back at his friend as he stepped after me into Rus in Urbe, where he gave me willingly enough a full and particular account of his life and adventures. I have no reason to doubt that the substance of it was true, and as to the ‘embroidery,’ I began to lapse into Mr Jones’s latitudinarian and exceptionally charitable mode of viewing it, when I found that Matthey only employed it for the amusement of his hearer or the exaltation of somebody else—never to puff or in any way benefit himself.

‘I don’t know what countryman I am, sir,’ said Matthey, still smiling; ‘a penn’orth of all sorts, as the boys say, I fancy. At any rate, I’ve been all over the world, and every place has seemed as strange or as little strange as another. Perhaps I feel most at home when I’m at sea. I was born at sea, I’ve been told, but who my mother or my father was I’ve no more notion than you can have, sir—except that I guess my mother must have been a Catholic, because this belonged to her.’

He showed me a common, coarsely-carved little crucifix, and said that he had worn it as long as he could remember.

‘Are *you* a Roman Catholic?’ I asked.

‘No, sir,—I’m a penn’orth of all sorts. But I’m not a heathen. I like to say my prayers, but it ain’t much odds to me where I say ’em. God’s the Father of everybody, I like to think, so orphans have plenty of brothers and sisters, after all, and I like to say my prayers along with my brothers and sisters wherever I find ’em at it.’

‘But how can you have any definite religion if one kind of worship is just the same to you as another?’

‘I didn’t say that I had any—what did you call it, sir?—definite religion. I’ve read a little bit—not much—but enough to know that there’s all kinds of religions in the world, and that those who believe in one of them ain’t very polite, for the most part, to them who believe in the others. But I haven’t head enough to puzzle out who’s right and who’s wrong in the things they wrangle about, and so I agree with ’em all round where *they* agree—and that’s in worshipping God.’

‘But *how* do you worship Him?’

‘Why, sir, I thank Him for bringing me into a world that’s so full of wonders and goodness. And I ask Him to keep me from doing what’s bad. And when I’ve misbehaved myself, I can’t be happy till I’ve asked Him to forgive me, and promised to try hard not to do so again.’

Professional feeling prompted me to continue to urge that Matthey—who was so outrageously catholic as not even to be a Dissenter—must be in a very unsatisfactory condition. But conscience whispered to me—“Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven”—are *you* half, or a quarter, as child-

like in your conceptions of your relation to your Heavenly Father as Matthey is?' That whisper changed the confident sermon I was prepared to utter into the following remark,—

'But you have said nothing about Jesus Christ, Matthey?'

'I've worn him as long as I can remember, sir,' said Matthey, producing his crucifix.

'Ah, but that is only superstitious reverence, Matthew.'

'Whatever it is, sir, I can't see the harm of it. This bit o' bone has often made me think about Jesus when it was a comfort to me to have Him to think of; and it's the only kind of evidence like that I ever had a mother. That's another reason why I like it. The woman that brought me up told me that she'd heard say that my mother put it round my neck when she was dyin', and though the good old woman wasn't a Catholic, she always made me wear it as a sort of charm, and so I got used to wear it, and after all it *has* been a sort o' charm. A thing that makes you think of Jesus and your mother at the same time, in a ship's fo'c's'le or when you're ashore with your wages burning a hole in your pocket, can't be such a bad thing for a young chap, sir.'

To hear Matthey's talk, however, one might have imagined that he had very rarely come in contact with any one likely to do him harm. The people of almost perfect excellence, of both sexes and all ages, whom he had encountered all over the world, he gratefully commemorated in a catalogue of almost wearisome length. If I felt somewhat sceptical as to the possibility of any

man's having met with so many models of behaviour, however wide his wanderings might have been, I could not doubt, nevertheless, that Matthey must be a sweet-blooded fellow, or he would not have fancied that he had met with them. Our estimate of the objective of all kinds is dyed in the colours of our subjectivity.

‘The eye sees all around in gloom or glow,
Hues of its own, fresh borrowed from the heart.’

The kindness of the old woman just mentioned Matthey was constantly commemorating ; but he said nothing of *his* kindness to *her*.

Putting together what he told me, and what Mr Jones had gathered from other sources of his history, I learnt that Matthey had been born on board a vessel bound from Bahia to London ; that his mother had died and been buried at sea about three weeks before the vessel was moored in the Import oblong of the West India Docks ; that a sailor whose Christian name was Matthew had been very kind to the orphaned child of the poor ‘furrin woman,’ and that he was washed off the bowsprit whilst stowing the jib as the ship was coming up Channel ; that the young wife of this Matthew had come to the docks to look after her husband, and finding herself a childless widow, had taken possession of the seaborne child to whom her husband had been kind, and who had no one else to claim him ; that she had given him her husband's name, and brought him up as if he had been her own child ; and that in return Matthey had behaved like a son to her, and when she grew too feeble to work,

had supported her entirely out of his wages and earnings. A year or two before her death he had given up the sea in order that he might be oftener with her, and taken to the calling he was following when I made his acquaintance; 'and since the poor old lady's been gone,' said Mr Jones, 'Matthey ain't a penny-piece the richer. He's got used to live on a little, he says, whatever he arns. Money ain't no use to him, he says. A precious little I fancy it is he lives on sometimes. He doesn't do badly I've heard from them he buys his shells of, and he's as safe as the Bank to trust. He'll pay every penny he owes first thing, so it's easy for him to git credit now. But if he didn't 'ave to git credit he'd do better, and he might easy do without it, if he didn't give an' lend—same thing where Matthey's concerned—sich a sight away. It's all right that he should have been kind to the old gal as was so kind to him; though from what I can make out, she wasn't quite the angel Matthey makes out, and I'll be bound to say he never cost her much—he's sich a smart, self-reliant chap, for all his imagination, that I'll be bound to say he arned his livin' pretty nigh as soon as he could run alone.'

'Isn't that a little bit of imagination on your part?' I asked with a smile.

'Well, p'raps 'tis, sir,' answered Mr Jones, laughing back; 'though you know I ain't given to that kind of thing. It's a queer thing, is a imagination. Matthey's fair puzzles me. He'd 'ave more money if he 'adn't got it, but then I doubt whether he'd be 'alf as 'appy. I know some of the folks that 'as got 'old of him now, an' I

can pretty well guess what the t'others is like. A nice lot they are!—and a sharp chap like Matthey must see it for hisself when his imagination ain't turned full on. But Matthey won't 'ear a word agin 'em. Bless you, he gets a'most angry when I tries to warn him like. "What's the good of your trying to spoil my notions of folk?" he says. "I ain't goin' to let 'em be spoilt. Where's the good of it? Who'd be the better for it?" he says; an' I'm 'alf-inclined to think Matthey's right. Any'ow he's al'ays so cheery that I orfen wish I could borror his eyes, or his way o' lookin' at things, or whatever it is. But it's too late in life for me to begin to grow a imagination. I expect it's a thing, too, that can't exactly be growed—it must spring up in ye nateral like at the beginning like the primroses.'

'It's never too late to begin to cultivate one part of Matthey's "imagination"—the charity that suffereth long and is kind, and thinketh no evil.'

'That's true sir, and I try 'ard to do my best that way—though bad's the best, I'll own, for I'm a cross-grained old hunks, I know. But still, if you'll excuse me, sir, I don't think you're speakin' quite to your text. When you can't 'elp seein' that a feller's a rogue, where's the charity to him or anybody else in makin' believe that you don't? If somebody don't call him by his right name, he may cheat hisself at last in a diff'rent way to Matthey's, who's as modest a man as I know, and git to fancy that he's a honest man, or else that everybody is rogues, and so it don't matter. You may look over the wrong he's done *you*—though that's 'ard, an' I can't feel some'ow

that it's quite right so far as him and you are concerned, when you've done nothing to provoke it from *him*—but if you let him off when he hurts you, ain't you encouragin' him to go on hurtin' other people—and is that charity. I ask you again, sir, either to him or the t'others? But there, we're gittin' into a argeyment, and that's what you and me don't like to 'ave together, do we, sir?'

Mr Jones's face reflected the smile with which I greeted this reminder of old times.

'I know what you mean, sir,' he said. 'You think I like to 'ave it all my own way—but I ain't so bad as that now, thank God. I should be in a poor way, if I was—I know that every day of my life. You leave me to think it out. I was talkin' about imagination, an' Matthey's seems to make him see everything and everybody through stained glass like. As I said before, that's a puzzle to me. Mayhap he wouldn't like the things 'alf so well if he saw them as they is, as they seems to folks that 'asn't got a imagination; but that puzzles me agin. He believes in what he sees as much as me in what I sees—and he ain't a fool. Who's to decide what's what? Imagination seems a nice kind o' thing to 'ave, if you want to be cosy, but who's right—the chaps as 'ave a imagination, or the chaps as 'asn't?'

'The Noes would have it—if you could put it to the vote, Mr Jones. But I don't think they would be right, though I don't profess to have more of an "imagination" than you do. People of "imagination," as you call them, I think, don't see through stained glass, but through lenses. They don't see what *isn't* in the things they look

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at, but more of what *is* in them than people who have no "imagination" do ; and then fortunately they can't keep in what they see, but somehow are forced to tell other people what they've seen, and have the knack of making other people like you and me see partly as they see. I dare say they have a little bit of conceited pleasure in being able to see what other people can't, and yet being able to make the others see it, after a fashion, when *they* have seen it ; but I don't think that counts for much with them. They talk, and paint, and write, and sing, just because they must, and feel grateful to God because they must ; and you and I and thousands of other people who have eyes to see and ears to hear, though we mayn't have much of an "imagination," ought to be very grateful to those who have, and more especially grateful to the God who has given it to them, and so given it at fresh second-hand to us.'

'Seems to me, sir, that you've got some kind of a imagination yourself,' was Mr Jones's not altogether complimentary comment on my outburst of æsthetical commonplaces. Having been prepared for Matthey's 'imagination,' I was not astonished to find his account of the voyages he had made and the places he had visited very different from the bald chronicles of their adventures one generally gets from sailors. A dry geographical primer is more interesting, contains more local colour, than most sailors' accounts of 'foreign parts.' Matthey, on the other hand, had discovered wonders everywhere. Perhaps he had invented some of the marvels he related ; but if so, his good faith in relating them was plainly un-

impeachable. If he had not seen the things of which he told, he had fancied that he did see them at the time, or come to fancy afterwards that he had seen them. Of course, he had seen the sea-serpent. 'We were coming from Australia round the Horn, and the sun—such a sun as you get in winter in those latitudes—and the moon and the stars were all in the sky at the same time. The sun soon went down, and the moon came out pretty brightish, and there on the weather-bow I saw the serpent as plain as I see you, sir, wriggling along towards us. As near as I could guess, it was about ninety fathom long—a dark, slimy thing, with a great spot o' light here and there all about it, as if it had got eyes on its back and its belly from head to tail. But if they were eyes, it didn't make much use of them. Every time its head came up above a wave—it was shaggy just like a lion's—it moved about this side and that, as you've seen a caterpillar do, and then down on the ship it steered again. I was terribly scared; for if the sea-serpent once gets hold of a ship, it climbs up the mast, crunching all the spars, and then down it drags you. But after all the serpent missed its distance, and went by a cable length astern of us. I could see it wriggling in a rage, and trying to "bout ship" and come after us; but there was too much of a sea on to let it.'

I ventured to inquire whether the so-called serpent might not possibly have been a huge mass of floating seaweed.

'Sea-weed, sir!' answered Matthey. 'I ought to know sea-weed—been at sea all my life almost. No, sir: that

was a sea-serpent, and very serious, I can assure you, I felt till I'd watched it out of sight rising and falling in the moonlight, as it slanted off s'uth'ards on that cold, lonely sea.'

If all Matthey's fancies had been of this fashion, Mr Jones would have had small reason for thinking 'a imagination' a 'cosy' thing to possess; but Matthey had seen far pleasanter visions, and dreaunt far more agreeable dreams. Shells were his favourite subjects. He made up all kinds of quaint individual biographies about their vanished owners. From a boy he had been a collector of shells, selling them to the dealers' buyers who board homeward-bound vessels.

'When a shell's a curiosity, they can get pounds and pounds for it, though it mayn't be as big as a bean, and so they keep a sharp look-out. Off Deal sometimes their men will come aboard, and they send men out all over the world after shells. The common sorts they buy by the hundred weight. There's a good market at home, and foreigners come over to England to buy, and then go back and hawk them just as I do. A shell's always a beauty. When it was let, it brightened up the sea; and when it's empty, it's bought for fancy work, or to put on the mantel-piece, or on your door-steps, or a window-ledge, or in a grotto, or a rockery, or round your garden, and so on. When I see those conchs in the gardens out round by London, half choked with dust when a bitter east wind is blowing, I can't help pitying them. It's a queer change from the places I've seen them lying in abroad. And yet I like to see a shell in a house or a

garden. It's like getting a whiff of the sea. Country people are very fond of shells. I mostly buy the common sorts that I can sell for a penny each, and work down, say as far as Devizes, in and out among the villages, and so on, both sides of the road. Some of the folks that buy of me you might think hadn't a penny to spare in the world ; but they'll buy a shell or two, and put them up to their ears—the old men as pleased as the youngsters—to hear the sea moaning inside. That's a strange sound to hear where nobody but yourself has ever seen the sea, and the people and the cattle and the crops and everything seem nodding off to sleep. But the country people brighten up when I tell them where I've been, and what I've seen, and all I know about the shells, and so on. Often they'll make me stop and have a bit of something to eat and drink.'

'Do you tell them about the sea-serpent, Matthew ?

'Yes, sir,' he answered, with a smile ; 'and *they* believe me. Living in the open air, I fancy, gives a man more faith. Country folks and sailors, I've noticed, are readier to believe in God's wonders than town's folk are. The smoke and the brick seem to choke and cramp their belief in anything they haven't seen for themselves.'

XXVI.

DAN THE DREDGER.



HOWEVER correct Mr Jones's opinion may have been of a good many of the people who availed themselves of Matthey's kindness, it was certainly wrong in reference to Matthey's landlord, Dredger Dan. Dan was in want of help sometimes, and then did not disdain to accept it from his good-natured lodger ; but Dan was an independent little fellow in his way, and made a point of paying back any help he got as soon and as fully as he could. A very worthy little man was Dan, hard-working, temperate, honest except in a point or two in which his moral sense had been warped by the traditions of his calling ; God-fearing and God-loving, too, in a genuine, although not always a very enlightened manner. A short, brown, shrivelled, silent little man, in antique, many-patched garments, making little fuss about his duty to his neighbour, but trying hard to do it, according to his lights, as well as earn

a living for himself; that is the best general description I can give of Dan. His employment was of a kind that might have been supposed full of startling incidents, and in the course of my talks with him I found that he *had* had adventures, but I was obliged to pull the incidents out of him, one after another, by main force, as it were. A long life of which the greater part had been spent in solitary toil—by night as well as day—a kind of toil which encouraged reticence, and in meditations on weather, tides, eddies, dead water, and holes and chinks in the river's bottom, had not qualified Dan to shine in conversation.

Of course, it was Matthey who introduced me to his landlord. Matthey had a very neat, snug little room in Dan's *not* very neat, snug little house. Dan's old wife had a small brood of orphan grandchildren to look after—the children of their eldest son. All *their* children were dead, and they had no one else to help them in looking after these youngsters. Nobody, but Matthey, that is, who would often lend the old woman a sailor's handy hand, when he happened to be at home—would help her in cooking, washing, carpentering, clothes-mending, nursing. Matthey could manage the children far better than poor old Mrs Dan. She tried to do her duty by them, but she was *too* old to have the charge of a swarm of noisy children. Almost the only luxury in which she indulged was a short afternoon nap, and even this she could not enjoy unmolested. The poor old body never had a smile or a kind word for the children, and attended to their wants in a feebly-hustling, querulous

fashion that won her neither love nor respect. They gave both willingly enough to cheery Matthey, who told them such capital stories, kept them in sweeties, did all kinds of things for them, and yet maintained discipline too. To be allowed to cluster in his little room, and hear his tales, was their greatest treat. Matthey would sometimes collect them there, when he would very well have liked to have his room to himself, simply that the poor old grandmother might get a little peace. At other times he would invite the old woman up to have a good cup of tea with him in cleanliness and quiet.

The old woman liked the neatness and tranquillity of Matthey's room, and yet she would make them a ground of grumbling against her lodger-host. 'Ah, Matthey,' she would say, 'it's easy to see that you ain't a married man—you carries your family under your hat. Or if you *are* a father, you've deserted your own flesh and blood, and I don't like to think *you'd* be so unnateral. Look at me. There's you, a great strong man, without chick or child to plague ye, and a poor old woman like me must have the life worried out of her by all them kids. And they ain't my flesh and blood neither—not regular—if you come to that. Their father was my son, poor boy, a deal finer chap than any o' them will ever be. But, I never said his wife was my daughter. I never give my consent to it. We'd words about it, me and my young Dan had. And there, as if that worn't enough—to take my boy from me—that poor stuck-up, washed-out wife of his must go and have no end of children jest as if she was as strong as a horse. And then when poor Dan

died, she must go and die too, to git rid of the trouble of 'em, and leave 'em all for me and my old man to look after. God knows we've often had trouble enough to keep ourselves, and now when we're gittin' old and things is at the hardest, we must have that stuck-up thing's brats poked on us. If they weren't Dan's too, they should walk pretty quick. But I ain't like some folks—I can't deny my own flesh and blood, and spend all on myself. Jest see how nice you've got things about you, Matthey, and then look at the muddle my place is al'ays in.'

In spite of the assistance which good-natured Matthey gave her now and then, Mrs Dan's part of the house certainly did present a very striking contrast to her lodger's. He had been in the navy as well as the merchant service, and so, in addition to the handiness which almost all sailors have, he had the smart, brisk, cleanly tidiness which is generally the distinguishing characteristic of the man-of-war's man. Add to his sailor's handiness and neatness his natural love of beauty, and it may be supposed that he had made a very cosy cabin for himself. He had caulked the deck, as he phrased it—*i. e.* filled up the cracks and gaping seams in and between the floor-planks and the holes where 'knots' had tumbled out—and kept his deck so assiduously 'holystoned' that the once black, uneven, pitted, and wrinkled boards were almost as smooth as a plate, and if they had not been brought back to whiteness, at any rate they were lighter than the yellow soap which had assisted the holystone in their purification. Rows of milk-white lockers of Matthey's own construction ran round the walls, which

Matthey, again, had papered with a pretty pattern, and dotted with prints that had taken his fancy, and for which he had made the frames. His little window-seat was full of pretty flowers. From his well-whitened ceiling hung a cage tenanted by a merrily carolling mule between the goldfinch and canary. At night-time a hammock hung from it also, tenanted by the peacefully snoring Matthey ; but by day it was deposited, neatly packed and corded, in 'hammock-nettings' of home manufacture fastened just below the window-seat. Over the mantel-shelf was Matthey's shaving-glass framed in triple rows of small white cowries. (Shaving has so gone out now amongst all classes of Englishmen, both landsmen and seamen—though, by-the-by, my friend was not an Englishman by blood—that I may mention the fact of my having seen Matthey shave before that little glass, and the way in which he used to do it. Old habit still told on him. He straddled his legs and swayed backwards and forwards, raised his razor with slow, and made it do its mowing with swift, caution, as if he were still anxious to preserve his centre of gravity, and save his chin and cheeks, and possibly his nose, from gashes, on board a pitching or rolling vessel.) On his mantel-shelf stood a stuffed, green, red, and purple king parrot, a polished tortoise-shell, and sundry sea-shells, pink and white, leopard-spotted, cloud-mottled, prismatically pearly, curiously whorled, fantastically spined and knobbed univalves and bivalves. On little green-corded book-shelves of home make, though the wood was Bermudian cedar, Matthey's little library was arranged : a Bible, a two-

volume Encyclopædia in boards, a Bailey's Dictionary in gravy-coloured binding, a few odd volumes of Natural History, and one or two old-fashioned poetry-books.

In Matthey's snug little cabin one evening I found his landlord smoking with him. 'This is Dan, sir,' said Matthey. The dredger got up, took his pipe out of his mouth, gave a nod, put his pipe into his mouth again, uncomfortably in the centre of his pursed lips, whence it hung like the trunk of an elephant, said never a word, gave no pull at his pipe, and so stood staring, with his hands in his pockets, until Matthey made him take his seat again, and bade him smoke in a more 'Christian-like'—*i.e.* corner-of-the-mouth—fashion. Matthey tried hard to drag the dredger into the conversation that followed. The old man was evidently gratified by the attention, but at first responded merely by a pull at his pipe, a nod, and then a puff from his pipe. The nod having to express negation, qualification, and all kinds of things, besides affirmation, and Dan's set face, even when up-raised to pull at his pipe, affording no context to judge from, this mode of conveying thought became bewildering; but at last Dan advanced to a pull, a nod, a puff, and a monosyllable. Eventually he advanced to a pull, a nod, a puff, and two, three, four, five, even half a dozen words together. We became very good friends, and often foregathered afterwards, but very little beyond the six-word limit of consecutive utterance could I ever get him. I should add, however, that, as our intimacy ripened, the pull, the nod, and the puff, although very nearly as frequent as formerly, no longer merely finished off utter-

ances which were concisely complete, but curiously broke into asthmatic fragments more lengthy deliverances. A man's biography, I think, is almost always best given in his own words. Every student of character can form his own opinion then, and is not obliged to adopt another observer's cut and dried estimate, without materials affording a chance of rectifying, curtailing, expanding, or possibly even point-blank contradicting it. From every biography in which the subject is not allowed to speak largely of and for himself, one learns far more of the mental and moral make of the biographer than of the biographe~~e~~. Where that plan, however, is adopted, you get to know at first hand what the man fancied himself, at any rate, or wished others to fancy him. You become intimate with him—very speedily get 'up' to his tricks of manner. You can form your own judgment as to whether he is telling more or less than the truth, or the flat opposite of it, unjustly denouncing himself, absurdly extolling himself, or fishingly depreciating himself with the vanity, rather than the pride which apes humility.

Omitting, therefore,—except where they would not obviously suggest themselves,—the questions by which I elicited my information, I will compress into a single narrative, in Dan's own manner, an outline of what I learned in many interviews, of the dredger's history. My triplicated full-stop is intended to represent the pull, nod, and puff with which Dan commenced and punctuated his discourse.

' . . . Born . . . *And* bred . . . Father before me
. . . His father before him . . . Rare games . . . Old

times . . . No docks . . . Ships a-layin' in the river
. . . Smugglin' . . . Smugglin' now . . . Cigars . . .
'Baccy . . . Furrin' steamers . . . Nothin' to speak on
though . . . Old times was the smugglin' times . . .
Wrong? . . . Don't know . . . Never heard it . . .
Wouldn't do wrong . . . No, not for no money . . .
Cribbin' coals *is* wrong . . . *That's* wrong, if you like
. . . Out o' lighters . . . At night . . . Nobody aboard
. . . Some dredgers does it . . . *That's* stealin' . . .
That, I'll own . . . Yes, we dredges for coal . . . When
they's at the bottom . . . That's different . . . Anybody
can see *that* . . . Barge is sunk . . . It's a Godsend
. . . Swarm to it . . . News spreads . . . 'Bove bridge
men comes down . . . Woolwich men comes . . . Bark-
ing . . . All parts . . . Work night and day . . . 'Taint
much we gets . . . After all . . . 'Specially in summer
. . . Folks don't care for fires . . . So much . . . Then
. . . Sixpence a bushel . . . Say . . . Winter's better
. . . Coals is dearer . . . Weather's wuss . . . More
barges capsizes . . . Shillin' a bushel then . . . And
we've arned it . . . Look how we fag . . . Old times
was the times . . . Yes, if you did honest . . . Smug-
glin' and findin's together . . . You're the fust that
ever told me smugglin' worn't honest . . . Matthey's a
goodish chap . . . I don't doubt . . . I never axed him
. . . Don't expect he'd say so . . . He's been a seafarin'
man . . . Understands all about sich things . . .'

'Well, putting together all their earnings, what do you
think the dredgers in old times used to get?'

' . . . *As* much . . . In a day . . . And less than

that . . . Orfen . . . As *we* gets . . . In a month . . . It's starvation . . . Nowadays . . . No, I don't grumble . . . Bones is scarce . . . Metal's scarce . . . Everything's scarce . . . River's fair empty . . . Nowadays . . . But God's good . . . He lets folks . . . Drownd themselves . . . *In* the summer . . . A copse is a real . . . Godsend then . . . There's the reward . . . And the . . . Inquest money . . .'

'Have you found many corpses?'

' . . . In my . . . Time, sir . . . A few . . . Last was a poor gal's . . . Shouldn't say . . . She'd ever been pretty . . . Jumped off London Bridge . . . Inquest at Dock Head . . . Nobody owned her . . . 'Tworn't likely . . . Got my inquest money . . . No reward . . . Worn't worth it . . . Who cared for her? . . . Yes, God might . . . *He's* good . . . Them He's made . . . Ain't much like Him . . . Most on 'em . . .'

'Do, do—did you ever hear of a case, I mean—do, do, do, dredgers ever rifle the corpses they find?'

' . . . Rob, you mean . . . I s'pose . . . You can't rob the dead . . . No, I never heared of a case . . . Don't we bring 'em ashore . . . With their purses . . . And watches . . . And all that? . . . Ketch me takin' . . . Anything . . . From a copse . . . His friends would know him by . . . Ain't it likely their purses is empty . . . Before they'd jump overboard? . . . And if they isn't . . . Who's to say . . . What's become of the tin? . . . *Robbery!* . . . You can't rob a copse . . . You've fished up . . . Out of the mud . . . I ain't a robber . . . I can say my commandments, . . . Thou shalt not

steal . . . I say my prayers . . . And I do my duty . . .
's far as I can . . . Ain't it God's orders? . . . Am I
a-goin' to run agin Him? . . . He's good . . . I know
. . . Whoever ain't . . . Yes, and I know about Jesus
Christ . . . Worn't *he* a poor man's friend? . . . If I'd
been a robber . . . I shouldn't ha' slaved . . . All my
life . . . As I've done . . . To am a honest crust . . .
For them as belongs to me . . . 's well as myself . . .
Out at two . . . *In* the mornin' . . . I am . . . Orfen
. . . Lonely? . . . Might be to you . . . I've my work
to do . . . I'm up to plazes . . . Some ain't . . . There
ain't many older than me . . . On the river now . . .
One mornin' . . . I fished up . . . A ring . . . And a
'alf-crown . . . And a silver teaspoon . . . All in one
mornin' . . . Ring worn't much 'count . . . But if I'd
been a lay-a-bed . . . I shouldn't ha' got 'em . . . 'Taint
once in ten years now . . . I get such luck . . . God
was wery good . . . He's for ever doin' somethin' . . .
Himself . . . And so I s'pose . . . He likes to help
them . . . As is willin' . . . To help theirselves . . .
Yes, I do pray to Him . . . When I'm out . . . In the
dark . . . For luck . . . 'Taint for that only . . .
I like to feel right with Him . . . 'specially . . .
When I've a copse . . . In tow . . . They pull
queer somehow . . . At the line . . . Yes, you can
see the lights . . . Ashore . . . And the ships'
lights . . . When 'taint' too foggy . . . But I'll own . . .
I do feel a bit lonely . . . As you call it . . . Then . . .
No, I ain't used to it yet . . . Copses is common . . .
But 'taint one man, you see . . . Gets all the copses . . .

No sich luck . . . Still 'tis good o' God . . . To diwide
'em . . . Among us . . . As He doos . . . And send
one . . . Sometimes . . . To ye . . . Jest when you
hain't a bit o' bread . . . In the house . . . God's good
. . . All round . . . If folks 'ud only . . . See it . . .
He won't let a chap drownd hisself. . . Or get drowned
. . . Without makin' him . . . Do good to somebody . . .
If you're only lucky enough . . . To fish the copse up
. . . Yes, pretty nigh all my life . . . I've been a-dredgin'
. . . On the London river . . . When I was a bit of a
boy . . . Mother's brother took me . . . Hysterin' and
that . . . He was a Bricklesea man . . . Bricklesea, you
know, sir . . . Mouth o' Colchester river . . . But I
came back, and went out with father . . . And when he
died . . . I had his boat . . . 'Till I could buy a new un
. . . 'Taint many new uns I've had . . . Since . . . But
what I've got . . . I expect . . . Will last me out . . .
And then they can do what they like with her . . . She'll
be as tired o' dredgin' most like . . . As I am . . . My
old gal will be gone . . . Most like . . . Before me . . .
There's the kids, but they must shift for theirselves . . .
Some on 'em would have to do it now . . . If their father
was alive . . . Me and my old gal . . . Has done our
best by 'em . . . And when we can't do no more . . .
We must leave 'em to God to look after . . . He's good
. . . And He's willin' enough . . . Don't He say so?
I goes to church . . . When I can spare time . . . 'Mat-
they don't . . . Though he's more time than me . . .
But Matthey's al'ays willin' . . . To read me a chapter
. . . When I wants it . . . Matthey's a better scholar

than me . . . Though he hain't so much notion . . . Of religion . . . But take him through . . . Matthey ain't such a bad sort . . . And God's good . . . To the wust o' men . . . I orfen tells Matthey that . . . To hearten him up . . . To do what's proper.'

XXVII.

A BROOD OF MUDLARKS.



FACTORY, the newspapers say, has been started for the extraction of grease out of Thames mud—grease to be exported to Holland, and thence brought back as Dutch butter. Whether any poor Londoners do really get their butter from the river's slimy bed I cannot state, but there is a little army of poor Londoners who pick their bread out of those steaming mudbanks. As the tide goes down bent old men and women, and little old-faced boys and girls, drop from the stairs, on which they have been waiting, and scatter themselves over the slime, to wade and pry, and pounce like swamp-birds.

In one of my river-side districts I had opened a little school in a lane leading down to the water, and into it I tried to entice the little mudlarks of the neighbourhood. It was not, however, until I opened it as a night-school that I succeeded in numbering any of them amongst my,

till then, scanty flock of pupils. They and other river-side children came readily enough then, but, as a rule, it was not to learn, the teacher told me. They liked the warmth of the room, the company they found there, and the chance it afforded them of fun in the shape of chaffing one another, and mutinously shouting down the teacher's orders. However, we managed to maintain at length some faint approximation to discipline, although to the last a scholastic martinet would have been horrified had he witnessed the free and easy ways, and the audacious pranks, we were obliged to put up with, through a fear that if we pulled even our silken reins at all tight, there would first be a general insurrection, and then a general exodus. But, as I have said, we did at last get what to us, at any rate, after our previous experiences, looked a little like order; a few of the children took an interest in their week-night lessons; and most of them were willing to come to the school by daylight on Sundays. All the mudlarks, I think, came. They told me that they did not work on Sundays, but they could give no reason why. When I first started the school I thought that the mudlarks' unwillingness to come by day in the week was simply caused by love of lazy liberty. Most children have a queer fondness for dabbling in the dirt. When you take your walks abroad in far more aristocratic regions than the East End you may often see a daintily dressed little toddler slyly eluding her nursemaid's vigilance, and then hear her chuckling delight because she has been able to plunge her foot into a puddle and splash her whilom snowy socks and plump little mottled bare legs. It was

some such love of dirt and mischief as this, I had thought, that made the young mudlarks take to the mud. I had no idea how *necessary* it was for them to grub about in the filthy stuff—how cold, and generally wretched, they often felt in it.

The first real insight I got into the miseries of young mudlarks' life I obtained from a quaint trio of them, whom I took illegal possession of as they were trotting past the school door one day when I had come down, and, as usual, found the teacher in almost solitary possession of the room. Two brothers and their little sister made up the number of my captives. They were all very ragged and dirty; they were all very lean, but there was just a hint of childhood's pretty chubbiness in the curly-headed little girl's face. A queer little 'Daughter of the Regiment' she looked, trudging along with an old fig-drum slung from her shoulder to put her findings in. Her elder brother had an old nosebag for his receptacle, the younger an old saucepan. The little girl seemed to be about five years old; her brothers about eight and seven. When I took hold of the little girl's hand, she raised a piercing scream, and her brothers, who were a little way a-head, instantly dashed back to the rescue. Up to their breasts went their little clenched right fists, backwards and forwards worked their little clenched left fists; 'Kick his shins, Sally,' 'Bite his thumb, Sally,' they shouted. They danced around me with menacing gestures, and looks and words of contemptuous defiance, and then putting down their heads, rushed in, and assaulted me in the most vigorous manner: little Sally

meanwhile kicking like a little donkey, and biting and scratching like a cat. By a change of front, however, I contrived to cut off the enemy from the river, and then, extending my flanks, succeeded in sweeping them before me into the school-room ; where, after a time, I succeeded also in making them believe that my intentions were better than they looked. No doubt Jack, the chief speaker, put a somewhat exaggerated value on the earnings they might have made had I not kept them from their work, but after all the indemnification which I had to pay in advance to my young friends—Jack standing out for that before he would give me, or allow his brother or sister to give me, any information—was no great tax even upon my scantily furnished purse. They were in the habit of selling half a quarter of a hundred weight of coal, picked up a piece at a time, for a penny, and, therefore, a shilling to be divided amongst them for doing nothing but talk seemed a wonderful bargain to them. I found that they had no father or mother—‘Not as we knows on.’ Jack remembered his father, fancied that he must have been a sailor, and that he gave money for their keep to the old woman with whom he left them when he went to sea. Neither of the other children had any recollection of their parents, and Jack could not remember his mother. ‘We lives with the old cat still,’ Jack went on, ‘pays her for our lodgin’, and grubs ourselves.’ ‘She’s a old witch,’ brother Bill interjected—‘cross as two sticks. She whops Sally when we ain’t by. She’s afeared to when we is, ’cos we butts her till she’s fit to bust—don’t she blow, Jack?’

‘But why do you live with her if she isn’t kind to you?’

'I didn't say nuffink about her not being kind,' answered Jack. 'She ain't game to whop me and Bill, and when she pitches into Sally, we sarves her out somehow. May as well live there as anywheres else, s'far as I sees. When we can't pay our lodgin', she turns us out, and we sleeps jest where we can. But we goes back when we've got the browns. Bill and me could manage, but it's cold for little Sally—dossin' out is, though we puts her in the middle, and cuddles up.'

I asked him in what kind of places they slept when deprived of their regular lodgings.

'Sometimes aboard the hempty coal-barges, and under a boat if it's 'andy. There's the pipes, too, when the roads is up—they ain't bad if you git one so as the wind can't cut through it. There was a old chap once when the roads was up give us a warm by his fire, and a sack to kiver us up. Down by the Sun too ain't a bad place—where they throw the hashes. And there's the little harches behind 'Alfmoon Stairs—they'd be unkimmon snug if they wasn't quite so mucky—an' there's rats there, an' Sally don't like rats. All kind o' places we could doss in, if it worn't for little Sally.'

This, however, was said in no tone of reproach. The two brothers were plainly as fond as boys could be of their little sister—the way in which she wedged herself between them during our interview showed how accustomed she was to their affectionate protection. I afterwards saw the regular lodgings of this little self-supporting family. They consisted of what was really merely a triangular cupboard without a door—a space boarded off

from a filthy landing at the top of a filthy, crooked staircase. A mat and a singed ironing-blanket, full of holes and dropping to pieces, were literally all the furniture. The 'old witch' anxiously informed me that she charged them nothing for this kennel, and gave them the free run of her kitchen, only taking a penny or two from them for the use of her fire when coals were *very* dear; but the different story I had heard from the children appeared the more probable. The landlady did not look like one given to perform actions in any degree disinterested, and when she found that her professions of kindness did not meet with pecuniary acknowledgment, she changed her tone, and abused both the children and the person who was inquiring about them with most vigorous virulence.

I am happy to say that I rescued the children from the 'old witch's' clutches. It would have been absurd to expect a poor woman like her to give the children even such lodging as she did give them for nothing. What were they to her? Only the orphans of a dead sailor who at one time paid her pretty liberally for their keep. But the woman had charged the children most exorbitantly. I will not mention the sum, because few people whose income is counted in pounds—even a very modest amount of pounds—can realize the crushingly important proportion which an expenditure of a few pence weekly bears to a weekly income of only a few pence more. The poorest of the poor are often most kindly helped by those who are a mere shade less poor, but they are also sometimes preyed upon by their next 'superiors,' as the smallest fish are gobbled by those a trifle larger.

In these papers I want to describe 'the poor' as they *are*. A poor person is not necessarily a posy of the choicest flowers of virtue, to be used as a striking contrast to a bundle of rank weeds of rich man's vice. Amongst poor people as well as rich, just as there are many very kind folks, so there are some most awful 'screws'—and the 'old witch' was one of the poor screwers of the poor. Of course, I did not trust merely to the children's account in arriving at this conclusion. I made inquiries in various quarters.

'I pity the pore little things, I'm sure, sir,' said one woman to me, 'but pity's about all I've got to spare 'em 'cept now and then a bit o' bread and drippin'—I've got so many o' my own. It's hard lines with the pore little things. I knows the ways o' their life, 'cos I was the same when I was a little un, and the wonder is I've growed up a honest woman. Most of the gals goes to the bad when they're children still, pore dears. It's sich a hard life, you see, sir, that they're glad to do anythink to git out of it, and nobody's told 'em it's wrong to act wrong like that. And the boys horfen grows up thieves. They're used to findin', you see, and so they gits into the 'abit o' findin' what ain't lost. Copper nails is about what pays 'em best to find, and they can't git a farden a pound more for dry rope than they can for wet, and so they prowls about the ship-yards, but they precious soon gits 'unted off. They'll prig coals too out o' the lighters, when they gits a chance ; and when they're ashore, they're 'angin' about the streets, tryin' to pick up a penny any

'ow. It's a bad life for a child. It's down by Greenwich. I used to go out. The swells sometimes would pitch us coppers out o' the inn winders and laugh to see us duckin' our 'eads and our 'ands, an' tumblin' one another over in the slush, scramblin' arter them. There worn't much kindness in that, as I can see. It's easy to give money for your fun, and what's a handful o' pennies to a swell? If they'd remember that them they sets scramblin' was made by the same God as made them, and give 'em a chance to larn to be'ave accordin'—*that* 'ud be kinder, to my way o' thinkin'. Not that the swells is so well-be'aved. Some o' those Greenwich fellers 'ud come to the winders with faces as red as biled lobsters, and shout and go on so as they'd ha' been took up if they'd been common people. It were a wonder they didn't flop over into the mud theirselves. For my part I can't see much difference between folks, swells or common folk, when they've got a drop too much drink in them. They goes on in the same silly way. And if eddication's good for anythink, that's what oughtn't not to be.'

I brought back the good woman to the little people I was inquiring about.

'Pore little dears! The boys is uncommon good to their little sister. 'Ow they'll stand up for her, and give her the best of everythink! And she's a nice little gal, though she do cry so when she've got the chilblains. I've seed her pore little toes swollen up like little tatur. It's cold work gropin' about in the mud barefoot, when it's 'alf-friz. Them pore little things goes and stands in the

'ot water runnin' down from Mr Grainger's works, to warm their legs up a bit. I should say there's things in it, though, that isn't wery good for chilblains.'

Brother Jack and Brother Bill are now black-bearded A. B.'s—both of them in the Naval Reserve. The uncles, one of them home from Bombay, and the other from Callao, stood sponsors for their sister's first-born son. 'Little Sally' has grown up into a good, shrewd little woman, and is married to an honest giant, who has regular work in a timber-yard—a most affectionate and obedient husband. She manages all his affairs for him, and he regards her as quite a superior being; but her brothers still extend most patronizing protection to little Sally when they are ashore, quite unconscious of the fact that it is *she* now who saves *them* from being put upon.

XXVIII.

MORE ABOUT THE ORPHAN FLOWER-SELLERS.



OP-GATHERING in a picture is a most 'idyllic' occupation. The hop-garden itself is so beautiful, that an artist who does not make it look so on his canvas must be a wilful traducer of natural beauty. The whilom stiff brown poles no longer look like ranks of giants' broomsticks. Their identity is lost in the gracefully irregular cones of glossy leaves and tassels of light-golden blossom that twine and droop around them. If you think of the prop at all, it is to fancy, as the lazy, sunny autumn breeze stirs the vine-like leaves of the bine, that the nearly smothered pole is, nevertheless, complacently murmuring—

' All my misfortunes are but as the stuff
Whence fancy makes me dreams of happiness ;
For *hops* grow round me, like the twining vine,
And fruits and foliage, not my own, seem mine.

The adroitest artist can only hint the deliciously bracing coolness of the autumn morning air, when the obliquely-shooting sunbeams begin to drink up the dew that trembles, like drops of etherealized quicksilver, on the leaves and blossoms of the vines ; or the lulling aroma that broods in a hop-garden, when its rows and bins are basking in early-afternoon sunshine. But he can make the ripe red wall, and white split extinguishers of warped weather-board on the roof of the old 'oast-house' in the background, almost as real as reality, and more eye-pleasing ; and—so marvellous is the beauty-discovering faculty of Art—he can group the very rags of the hop-pickers into combinations on which the eye delights to linger. Most of the pickers, when the 'tally' pleases them, *are* merry-faced at hopping-time, and therefore the artist is only faithful in giving them merry faces. But how he *idealizes* those merry faces !—keeps the fun in them, the features often, too, without giving a hint of the too frequently filthy jest that has caused the merriment. No doubt, he is right in doing so. He has to paint a picture that will please, and even vice takes no delight in its own portrait limned without softening. More or less unconsciously, also, he may have a moral purpose in his æsthetics—though few of those who, directly, most need its teaching, may ever see his doubly-coloured sermon. Art worships Beauty ; and, *au fond*, the beauties of the body, mind, and heart are intertwined like the three Graces. The artist paints the hop-garden innocent, because he feels, perhaps, rather than thinks, that the hop-garden would be more beautiful, in every sense, if it *were* innocent.

But, when taking a rare holiday, I have helped to strip off the yellow blossoms of the hop into the canvas bins—respectfully admonished by the professional workers, whose ‘tally’ I was doing my best to swell as an amateur, on account of the number of leaves with which I was unwittingly vitiating it; and I have heard the talk that was going on, close at hand, over bins unaided by my amateur labours, and unawed by my professional presence—possibly stimulated into ranker impropriety thereby. I have seen the appreciative grins with which my comrades in the long double row of pickers greeted those sallies—looking very much like bubblingly-oozing bottles of stout, just at the point of bursting, in the hot sunshine, from the painful efforts which their interested sense of propriety made them make to abstain from acknowledging the same with an uproarious guffaw. I have also seen something, and have heard more from others, of the scenes that take place in and about the thronged ‘hopper-houses;’ and, therefore, hopping does not seem very ‘idyllic’ (in the modern sense) to me. The idyll is of the ancient type—hoppers talk and act like Theocritus’s peasants.

Nevertheless, I cannot help rejoicing when hopping-time comes round. The poorest poor of East End and South London slums then get their one real holiday, and, whilst they take it, gain not only health, but unwonted wages also. Their lodging, rough as it generally is, is probably not worse, either physically or morally, than what the bulk of them have been accustomed to ‘at home.’ If they did not go into the country, they could not escape, poor creatures, from defiling sights and sounds; and, in

the country, there is just a chance that Nature's teaching may tell upon them in some slight degree. At any rate, for a week or two, they have work that they can enjoy, and fresh air to do it in. That does not seem much to say, but it means a good deal when said in reference to those whose lot in life has been cast in the midst of the dreary drudgery and squalid misery of the stifling streets, lanes, alleys, and courts of East and South London. Down the London pickers swarm to join the local pickers, whom they terrify often—especially the Irish amongst the strangers—and, generally speaking, I am afraid, do *not* often edify. Some already engaged, and some on spec.; some by the South-Eastern's hopper-trains, and some by boat to Gravesend, and so, on foot, across country, to hop-begirt old Maidstone; some tramping down the whole dusty, weary way; some jolting down in fearfully overladen costermongers' carts and barrows. The provisionally hired are sometimes met upon their way by hop-growers' waggons; the others get to their quarters as best they can. And even this humble army is followed by a little swarm of lazy vultures, who have no thought of working, but mean to pick up anything that may come handy in the excitement of hop-harvest—even though taken from the scanty furniture of a hopper-house carelessly left unpadlocked.

Queer barracks most of these hopper-houses are—long, low, red-brick lines of hovels, bedded with straw, in each of which a dozen and more of men, women, and children 'house' like pigs. Anyhow, the night air of the line of walled and latticed-off compartments must almost neces-

sarily be foul, but their miscellaneous tenants make it fouler by blocking up, to the best of their ability, the means of ventilation provided. The poor creatures are accustomed to foul air at night ; a good many of them, no doubt, have often felt cold air blowing over them at night ; but *that* experience is clustered around with so many dreary associations, that, when they can get the chance, they like to be warm at night, at any cost. Some hop-growers house their pickers in tents, some in extemporized structures of straw-thatched hurdle, some in the out-buildings of their farmsteads—the last *not always* taking proper care that the cattle-sheds are decently cleansed before their human cattle are turned into them. Common cooking-places are erected outside the barracks of all sorts. The farmers supply their casual labourers with fuel ; common gathering-fires are lighted, *al fresco*, and round them, after dusk, the hoppers lounge, and gossip, and sing, and dance, and squabble, and fight. Near such a fire I once heard an ex-student of Maynooth—at least, such was his account of himself—warbling a Latin hymn in joyous tranquillity, like a pious lark, whilst a party of his scarcely more tattered countrymen and countrywomen were breaking, in a howling and screeching ‘free fight,’ one another’s heads, and the head of any Saxon rash or stupid enough to venture within the jaggedly eccentric circle of the combat. The ‘domestic’ conditions of the hop-pickers often seem pestilence-inviting to a theorist, but they are used to such conditions, and in the country they have so much of fresh sunny air to aid them, that, as a rule, there, at any rate, they can manage

to defy what seems to a sanitary theorist their inevitable fate.

Sometimes, however, in spite of sunny country air, pestilence does swoop down upon the hoppers—most literally with a vengeance. It is of such a time that I have to tell—as I can reproduce the story told me by Phœbe, the flower-seller, the only survivor then of the little family in which she had played, or rather genuinely performed, the part of mother. Phœbe's gravity—so out of keeping with her tender years—had struck me when I first saw her ; but when she told me her story of death in the hop-gardens, the few months that had passed since we first became acquainted might have been years multiplied tenfold, so completely had she lost the merest trace of even the very little childlike gaiety she ever possessed.

The four children had been enlisted in a little party going down to Kent on foot, but little 'Em' was to have a seat in the tiny, donkey-drawn baggage-waggon of the party. Merrily they trooped out of their East-end quarters in the early September morning. Merrily they tramped across London Bridge—the blue-guernseyed, greasy-corded fish-buyers going up and down the steps leading to crowded Lower Thames Street and Billingsgate envying the hoppers as they passed. Merrily they turned down by the red church in the Borough, and so into the Old Kent Road—the prematurely sere leaves of its stunted garden-trees all clogged with dust ; and up to and over dusty, brown-burned Blackheath ; and so at last into a road that began to look like country. The blackberries in the hedges were dusty, but Harriet and Dick hunted

for them as if they had been peaches or pine-apples, and smeared their faces and fingers with the juice until they looked like jovial little cannibals. 'Em' sometimes joined them in their hunts, but poor little Em was weaker even than usual—it was chiefly for her sake that Phœbe had arranged to take her little family into the country: so little Em generally sat in the donkey-cart, supplied by Harriet and Dick with a good many more blackberries than she could have gathered for herself. As for Phœbe, she was far too staid a personage to indulge in any such frivolous pursuit as 'blackberryin',' when no money could be made out of it.

All the party, young and old, except poor little Em, could 'pad the hoof' without inconvenience. The change from the dingy, dung-scented streets in which they generally toiled about was so great that the walking hoppers thoroughly enjoyed their country tramp; and little Em, who had only to tramp when she pleased, began to think that she must have been mysteriously metamorphosed into 'a lady.

The hoppers camped out that night under the donkey-cart and in a dry ditch. There were nettles in the ditch, but Dick mowed them down with such vigorous valour that even tired little Em could not help laughing. The grown-up members of the party laughed again when Phœbe called her brood around her to say their prayers before they went to sleep; but the laughter, though thoughtless, was not, for the most part, unkindly, and when Harriet and Dick appeared half inclined to mutiny, most of the elders, of whose ridicule they had stood in

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dread, gruffly bade them do as they were bid. One more night the little party camped out, just outside Maidstone, on the Wrotham road ; and then the chief of the party went into the town—speedily returning to conduct his followers to the work he had secured for them a mile or two beyond. They settled themselves in their compartment of the long row of hopper-houses, and then took holiday for the rest of that Saturday. Their picking was to begin upon the following Monday. Phœbe stayed at home with her little invalid, but Harriet and Dick roamed far and wide through the shady woods and sunny fields and lanes, revelling in the bright air and their freedom from the necessity of doing anything but amuse themselves. They came home very hungry to their evening meal. The kitchen fires were burning brightly. Laughing hoppers were clustered about them cooking, or sitting in knots on the little strip of green in front of the hopper-houses, taking their suppers. And then one or two bonfires were lighted on the green, and the hoppers gathered round them, dancing, and joking, and singing—almost all of them in the best of tempers. Before the next Saturday night came round, fierce, foul language and savage blows had begun to interrupt the harmony of those open-air *soirées* ; and when the Saturday after that came round, the penumbra of the awful shadow of death was stealing with the night-dusk over the little colony ; but *that* Saturday night all was pleasurable excitement or peaceful rest upon the little green. The stars budded and suddenly blossomed into serene or trembling brilliance in the almost cloudless sky ; the moon came up,

and made the smoky fires look a little less cheerful from their contrast to her silvery light, but Phœbe and Em still sat out upon the green—Em cuddled in Phœbe's motherly—almost grandmotherly—arms; each thinking, in her different way, that she had never been so happy before. Dick and Harriet, meanwhile, as happy in their way, zigzagged about in the moonlit dusk like bats—except that bats generally make no noise, and Dick and Harriet were about the noisiest people on the green. Their high spirits and Harriet's prettiness had already made them favourites in the hopper-colony. Phœbe grew anxious when she found that they did not 'mind' her as they had been accustomed to mind her in London. That was the sole drawback from her tranquil pleasure. She fussed about like a hen that wants to get its chickens to roost, when she thought that it was time at last for all of them to go to bed. Harriet and Dick were both saucy when she told them to come in, but when they saw that Phœbe was half ready to cry, and that little Em was crying, at their disobedience, they came readily enough then. One or two of their grown-up companions were already stretching themselves on the straw that formed the common bed of the compartment—one or two who were not the best of the party, and who might, perhaps, have encouraged the young truants, if they had been inclined to strike against prayers again; but Harriet and Dick, nevertheless, knelt down and began to say their prayers directly Phœbe bade them do so. She had roughly curtained off an angle of the hovel with an old shawl—almost the only *impedimentum* which the children had burdened the bag-

gage-waggon with. Within that little screen the little vagrant could enjoy something of the 'domesticity' she liked, in spite of her vagrancy. The children were soon sound asleep in the clean abundant straw. When all the other tenants of the hovel had rolled themselves up in their rugs, &c., and were snoring in the dim light of the lantern, hung slanting from the rough wall,—packed almost as tight as a drum of figs, the air of the hovel soon ceased to be pure, and before the middle of the next week the straw was anything but clean; but all those bed-fellows were used to rude lodging, and did not break their hearts about such trifles.

On the Sunday morning Phoebe and her brood were allowed to get their turn at the washing-bowl pretty early by their grown-up and hobbydehoy companions, who, after their fashion, were almost all kind to the orphans, and then as the donkey-cart-owner who had engaged them 'grubbed' his party, the children were free to spend the Sunday as they pleased—so long (if they wished to get any 'grub') as they were back to the common meals.

In spite of the numbers that had flocked into the country parish, the village church had few more worshippers than usual in it that Sunday morning. Perhaps even fewer, since some of the parishioners who had been engaged for the hop-picking had already been corrupted by the latitudinarianism of their strange fellow-workers; and, like them, preferred a snug snooze or a lazy lounge to church-going. A large percentage of the strangers were Roman Catholic Irish, and they, of course, could not be expected to go to an English Protestant church,

even though the vicar might be, as they soon learned he was, very fond of Catholics: anxious to obtain for them at any cost of money or clerical dignity (from an ultra-Protestant point of view) to himself, the spiritual consolation in their last moments which, much as they loved him and his for the kindness which he and his family bravely, self-denyingly bestowed upon all the pestilence-stricken strangers who had come within his parish's bounds, the Irish amongst them—to their grief, because they were so grateful—could not get from *him*. 'Ah, sure, sir-r-r, ye'll belong to the ould Chur-r-ch yit,' said an old Irishman to the vicar, when he had brought a priest with him to the old Irishman on his death-straw. I have no love for Romanism. It degrades the 'poetry' which, I think, it can rightly claim—the charm of historical continuity, and so on, and so on—by childish mummeries; and then, as it seems to me, it so terribly emasculates a man in a mental point of view. I can understand a very good man, with a sentimental bias, becoming a Romanist; but how a man like Dr Newman—mentally as great as morally he is good—a man who could logically crumple up all the Œcumenical Council in one hand, and in the other almost all its Protestant critics—how such a great man amongst great men as he could have become and can continue a Romanist, especially now when Romanism wishes to formulize into a dogma its previously floating pretension of Papal Infallibility (*poor old Pio Nono infallible!*) by a counting of episcopal noses, attached, in spite of their episcopacy, to not the most brilliantly-witted of pates (from whatever part of the world the episcopal sheep

may have blindly rushed, or have been painfully dogged, to *baa* in unison in the Papal hurdles)—*that* is a mystery to me. Notwithstanding, I can well understand how the vicar brought the priest to the old Irishman to guide and comfort him in his last moments. It was only a Roman Catholic priest from whom the old Irishman would have accepted guidance and comfort then—and, after all, how much ‘the voice of the Church’ and ‘private judgment,’ in spite of their wrangling, leave in common to their respective votaries! Having relieved myself, moreover, by expressing my opinion of Romanism, I must in fairness add that a good many Protestants seem to me to exercise not a whit more ‘private judgment’ than the most ignorant Romanist does. He believes what he has been taught from his earliest days *his* Church requires him to believe, and *they*, with as much or as little reason, and with equal scrutiny, accept the dogmata of *their* churches.

Phœbe marshalled her little troop to the village church in the morning, but in the afternoon Dick and Harriet again played truant. They professed that they would rather go to church in Maidstone, and they certainly started in the direction of its grey old church, grey, ivy-clad old palace, and grey old ‘college,’ with its famous hop-garden of gigantic poles, which they could see from their barracks rising above the Medway beyond the lock; but neither Dick nor Harriet swelled the congregation of All Saints’ that afternoon. They got into trouble, and were saucy when Phœbe scolded them on their late return. ‘I got into a temper, sir,’ poor Phœbe told me, ‘an’ told ’em that me and Em would git on twice as well

if they was gone for good—that none of the children was anythink but a bother to me. That made poor little Em cry, and then Dick and 'Arriet began to cry. Little did I think what was a-goin' to 'appen. If I'd known it then, I'd 'a' cut my tongue out fust, afore I'd 'a' said it.'

However, the children were soon reconciled, and next morning went to work in high glee. The pickers took their stands along the lines of bins, the bines were cut, the poles plucked up and slanted against the bins, and the pickers' fingers began to strip the tall *thyrsi* of their grape-like clusters, only resting when the tally-man and his assistants came along with his bushel-measure, tallies, and sacks. Such standing-still work seemed so much like play to the little Londoners that it was hard for them to believe that they had been promised more a day for it than they had ever earned by their wearisome trampings through London streets. Sweet air sighed lazily about them, leaf-chequered sunlight fell upon them almost constantly; tan-sailed barges now and then noiselessly crept past the bottom of the hill, on the slope of which the children were working, and the monotonous wooden rumble of the riverside paper-mill, after a time, did not seem much more out of harmony with the calm sunshine than the gliding barges did.

'I should like to go 'opping all the year round,' said little Dick, 'wouldn't you, 'Arriet?' Poor vain little Harriet tossed her pretty little head, and said that *she* didn't mean to go working much longer; she'd 'ave somebody as would be glad to work for her, soon 's ever she was growed-up.

Dick and Harriet thought it great fun when the pickers in their hop-field struck. 'Eight to the shilling' had been the tally agreed upon, but, after a few hours' grumbling, the pickers suddenly knocked off work, and became so clamorous and menacing in their demands for a reduction of the tale to six, that the local pickers who had been—very willingly—forced into the strike by their cosmopolitan colleagues, grew scared at the violence of their allies, and the hop-grower began to think that he must ride into Maidstone to get a magistrate to let the commandant of the Cavalry Dépôt know what was going on. Such scenes terrified poor little Em. They disgusted grave Phœbe. 'What's the good of it?' she said to me. 'If the masters give in, you might ha' arned pretty nigh as much, if you'd gone on workin' without making a to-do—shoutin' and fightin' an' that, an' nobody to pay you for your time.'

The riotous scenes which soon took place in and about the hopper-houses in the evening also terrified Em and disgusted Phœbe; whilst Dick and Harriet rather enjoyed the tumult. But on the whole—up to that Saturday I have named—grave Phœbe was quietly comfortable in the hop-fields; although she could not help feeling rather anxious when she found that little Em grew no stronger, and was mortified, as well as honestly grieved, at discovering that Dick and Harriet were becoming less amenable to her motherly discipline.

When the hoppers left London, cholera was raging in it. There were streets in and about Shoreditch and St George's in the East through which people who did not belong to them did not care to pass, or if considerations

of time and fatigue did compel them to take such routes, they shunned the footpaths with their foul-breathed doorways and court-entrances, and took the roadway, as in the old plague-times, avoiding jostling with those they met in a space-wasting way that was strange on the part of bustling Londoners, who generally look as if they were running a race for their lives against Time. *These* were dodging a race for their lives against Cholera. Fruit and vegetables were very plentiful that autumn: but green-grocers and costermongers and street-market sellers in the poor parts of London complained that it was no use being able to buy cheap, when their customers had got it into their heads that 'greens and sich was p'ison.' 'I'd sell my barrerful for what I give for it,' said a costermonger of my acquaintance at that time. 'Alf price they should 'ave it, if it come to that; but they won't 'ave nothing to speak of at no price. Blow the doctors!—putting sich maggots into folks' 'eads, an' robbin' honest men o' their livin'. Where's the 'arm to anybody of a ripe Horlines plum, I'd like to know? Blow them doctors! says I.' It was partly the thought that they were escaping from a plague-stricken city that made our hoppers so merry as they crossed London Bridge. They fancied that they were giving cholera the slip, but it followed them down into the country. The hoppers lived in the country, when within-doors, with as little regard to health as when in town. Perhaps, knowing as they thought themselves in comparison with the 'yokels,' their country purveyors palmed off, under the guise of 'bargains,' worse provisions upon them than they would have been permitted to buy

in London—even if so disposed. At any rate, cholera broke out amongst them. On that third Saturday night there was a sound of lamentation and great woe at the Irish end of the row of hovels in which our children were housed. Cholera had claimed its first victim in rural Kent, and old Irishwomen were *keening* over the corpse. Next day the dread disease began to pick off the hoppers as if they were hops. It was a dreary Sunday, though the sun never shone more serenely bright than it shone then. Doctors were coming and going. The vicar left out the Litany in the morning, and curtailed his sermons, both in the morning and the afternoon, in order to return more speedily to his work amongst the dying. An awful week followed. The hoppers no longer laughed over their work, or laughed with a drunken defiance of Death. The ‘cramps’ seized them as they stood beside the bins. The clergyman and his wife and daughters took sleep and food in hastiest snatches in their anxiety to get back to their livid, awfully contorted patients. The Anglican vicar, as I have previously intimated, sent for Romanist priests, and piloted them himself to their writhing clammy perspiring co-religionists. They died so fast that a huge, gaping common grave had to be dug for them in the green, quiet old churchyard. They were put into it by twos and threes, and every now and then a Roman Catholic priest would come to such a funeral, and take off his hat in genuine reverence, whilst the Anglican Catholic, whose catholicity he then, at least, was eagerly anxious to acknowledge, read the solemn service in a voice broken by weariness and sorrow. That huge, gaping grave, in which

scores are buried, is covered now with grass and daisies that look as if grass and daisies had grown there for ever. The barges glide by at the bottom of the hill, the paper-mill pounds monotonously, just as they did before. Hoppers swarm down into the parish, and frolic and fight as of old; although the old hands look serious for a minute or two when they talk of that old time, and the new hands cannot help shuddering a little when they hear the story, and see the simple stone that marks the resting-place of Death's greedy double handful. But Phœbe has never recovered from the shock she then received. The family with whom she has lived almost ever since all speak highly of her, except that the children belonging to, or visiting the house, cannot help saying now and then, though they *are* very fond of her, 'She's got no fun in her; she gets tired of playing so soon.'

Harriet, Emma, and Dick were buried in that common grave down in Kent. In spite of their higher spirits and greater strength, Harriet and Dick died before weak little Emma. 'Kiss me, Phœbe,' she said, when, just before her death, she was momentarily relieved from the horrid tortures of her disease. 'I'm going to see Jesus Christ, *a'n't* I, Phœbe?'

'Arriet and Dick didn't ax me to kiss 'em afore *they* was took; they was too bad, poor dears. Awful bad they was,' said Phœbe, for the first time breaking into a sob as she told me her sad story. 'But they would 'a' done, bad as they was, if they'd known 'ow I wanted it. They was dear good children, though they wouldn't mind ye

some times ; that they was, poor dears. An' so was poor dear little Hemmer. I've only myself to look to now, sir ; but God's al'ays good, I don't doubt though some-times it don't look like it.'

XXIX.

MY GREENGROCER.



OME people write and talk as if the mere fact of a man's having to work hard made him an object of pity. I have no sympathy with such maudlin laziness. There is scarcely any one in any rank of life, really worth calling a man, who has *not* to work hard. A navvy works hard, a puddler works hard, but I doubt whether, even in the matter of physical endurance, they work *as* hard as a successful lawyer or a conscientious Cabinet minister with the settlement of the Irish Question on his mind. All four like their work, according to their various fashions. They are proud of their power of working, and enjoy its remuneration in the shape of superior wages, huge retaining fees and refreshers, professional reputation, social honour, historical fame achieved before the winner has had the chance of learning from his own experience how hollow a delight historical renown may possibly be to

those of its possessors already, in the literal, dead-and-buried sense, historical ; &c., &c. Men highly-paid, in any sense, for their piece-work, very probably, get far less pleasure out of life than they might, if they were not quite so eager to tax their powers to the uttermost ; but that is their own look-out. Very possibly, too, such pleasure as they do get, after the first delicious taste of it, may not seem half as delicious as they fancied it would be, when they first girded up their loins, literally or metaphorically, for their various struggles ; but highly-paid, successful skilled workers are not the only people in the world doomed to find that, however hard they may work, realized facts do not correspond with Fancy's dreams about such facts. It is when men, women, and children—a great many of them manifestly too weak for the work they have undertaken (humble enough though it may be)—have, nevertheless, to toil on at that work (unless they would become grudgingly-fed paupers, or at once consent to die,—after all, at the parish's expense), without any hope of a brighter earthly morrow, and for present pay that cannot secure them the sufficient food, drink, clothing, and shelter of which the lower, the lowest, animals are generally sure until their death comes : it is under such circumstances that hard work becomes a proper object for pity. Work, *per se*, is a blessing rather than a curse for man. How miserable people who have nothing to do, which they feel they *must* do, generally are ! Upper-class triflers, I fancy, submit to what seem to outsiders like myself 'Society's' frequently idiotically labour-exacting requirements, because they find some

comfort, in their lack of anything real to do, in trying to believe that they are under a moral obligation to obey those labour-exacting requirements. The retired shopkeeper grows weary of his retirement, and goes back, under the excuse of its being a busy time for the new comer, to the shop whose 'overwhelming custom' was the reason why he disposed of it—takes off his coat, borrows an apron, and serves 'for love' behind the counter. If the thousands of poor in whose midst I live, and have lived for years,—some of them, doubtless, lazy enough, but the majority of them hard-workers at 'starvation-wages,' or, worse still, seekers-in-vain for work that would win such wages—if these poor creatures could only obtain work that would give them something like decent support, coupled with a hope of being able to improve the conditions of life for themselves and their children, in however modest a progression, I would not care how hard they worked—within bounds of reason. It is the *hopelessness* of East End labour—the typical bulk of it—that makes it so depressing a spectacle. The East End, of course, houses many honest earners of high wages, and also dishonest winners of precarious but occasionally very considerable gains—the latter kind of exceptional pecuniosity, it is almost needless to say, only makes the general spectacle the more depressing. But the people I am referring to constitute the bulk of the population of many a district in the East End—the ill-fed, ill-clad, ill-housed men, women, and children who try, according to their lights, to earn 'an honest living' by fingers, limbs, backs, and voices, and, after all their trouble, get only enough to en-

able them to work again next day for their sorry, charmless, temper-souring 'livelihood,' whilst some of them look upon even such a livelihood as 'easy circumstances' beyond their reach.

Theoretically, of course, the son of the poorest man in England can be raised to the House of Lords, as Lord Chancellor or Archbishop of Canterbury—if only he has wit enough, and can get the other necessary preliminary qualifications. The theory is indisputable, and, often, as it has been laughed at, is still occasionally aired at Charity Dinners, with great complacency, by genuinely excellent old and middle-aged gentlemen breathing forth universal benevolence, and hope for everybody, from comfortable, well-fed, decorously wine-scented lips.

But I do not think that any East End clergyman—anxious to convince his poor that they had a chance in this life as well as the next—ever used that theory as an argument. If he did, I can imagine the apathetic disregard, or the fierce disdain, which his prophecy of smooth things met with.

Under these circumstances it is a great relief to stumble now and then on an East End struggler who has honestly worked his way to competence.

My greengrocer is now a well-to-do man, who could buy his clergyman up a dozen times over. He is a churchwarden, keeps his horse and chaise, and on Sundays wears a 'chimney-pot' hat, a suit of glossy black broadcloth, enlivened in summer with a spotless white waistcoat, and a handsome gold watch and chain. He is often spoken of deferentially as Mr. Mixon, but I re-

member him when he was only known as Civil Sam, and was too poor even to keep a donkey. He is as civil and as right-principled now as he was then, and, therefore, it has been a pleasure to watch him expanding into his present portly proportions, commercial and personal.

When but a mere boy, Sam, who was then very small as well as young, found himself under the necessity of picking up a living as best he could in London streets. Paved with gold, according to the old childish belief, they certainly prove, in a secondary sense, to some lucky adventurers; but the bits of orange-peel with which they are littered are the nearest approach to gold which those who have to make London pavements their place of business generally find upon them.

However, there was nothing very particular in Sam's having to turn out to get his living in London streets—hundreds of children have to do the like. What was exceptional in his case was that the parents whose death had sent him adrift, had never soured his naturally sunny disposition by ill-usage, and if they had done little else for him, they had taught him that dishonesty in word or deed was a despicable thing.

Sam soon had his principles put to the test. When the young vagrants who prowl in London streets see another lad as friendless as themselves, wandering about like them, shyly creeping into their night-resting-places, but yet not otherwise adopting their mode of life, they are very anxious to make him altogether just such a one as themselves. This feeling may, perhaps, partly spring from the spirit of proselytism that prevails in all grades of

life—the desire people of all kinds have that all whom they come in contact with shall adopt their views, and tar themselves, whether for better or worse, with their brush. But the young Arabs, I fancy, are partly actuated by a less selfish feeling than this. In their ignorance, for which *they* are not responsible, they think that it would be a kind thing to teach the novice to steal. They pity him in their rough way because he has to share with them the ‘hard lines’ of street life, without enjoying any of the alleviations which they can make it yield. Sam went with his new friends—glad enough at first of their company—in their slinking rambles about the markets and the shops that displayed small easily-portable portions of bacon, &c., on slabs outside. The Arabs were not altogether disinterested in their kindness. They wished to utilize Sam’s innocent face, and soon informed him that they would not continue to give him grub, if he was ungrateful enough not to employ his natural advantages for the purpose of slipping up unsuspected and carrying off the articles which they directed him how to appropriate. Sam was grateful for the grub, but still he would not obey his young tutors’ instructions. He said that it wasn’t honest to steal—father and mother had told him so; and then his new instructors derided him in chorus as a ‘b—— flat.’ That was a hard imputation for a boy to bear, but Sam still stuck to his principles. But when his comrades went on to taunt him as a coward, Sam at last lost his temper. Such behaviour, he thought, cancelled the obligation under which he lay for grub. ‘I couldn’t ‘elp pitchin’ into one on ‘em, sir,’ Sam long afterwards

told me, 'and I licked him, though he were 'alf a 'ead taller than me. I didn't want 'em to think that I worn't game to do a thing, if it was only right to do it.'

After that pugilistic vindication of the principles of honesty, Sam's tempters regarded him with a surly kind of respect; but they parted company with him, and he was very lonely.

One bleak November day, Sam was wandering along the bleak Whitechapel Road, wondering how he was to earn a penny, when he saw an old gentleman on horse-back, who was looking about as if he wanted somebody to hold his horse. Sam ran up to him just as he stopped before a door, and, touching his tattered cap, proffered his services.

'*You* don't look as if you could be trusted,' said the old gentleman, when he had dismounted.

'Yes, sir, I can,' answered Sam, sturdily.

'Well, take hold of the bridle, then, and just walk him up and down; but mind, there'll be somebody looking out of the window at you all the time.'

In about a quarter of an hour, the old gentleman came out of the house again, in a very bad temper.

'Oh, you *haven't* run away, then,' he said, when Sam brought the horse up to the pavement for him—speaking almost as if he felt aggrieved at the non-justification of his suspicions. 'There's sixpence for you.'

So having said, he put half a sovereign into Sam's hand, mounted, and ambled off. When Sam found that he had got gold in his hand, he felt sure that a mistake had been made, and rushed after the old gentleman,

shouting, 'Hi, sir! Stop, sir!' But the old gentleman had been ruffled by his visit, and so merely turning round to shake his whip, and growl, 'You saucy young rascal! Sixpence was a deal too much,' he put his heels into his horse's sides, and urged him into a trot. But Sam put on extra steam, seized the old gentleman's off-leg, and holding up the half-sovereign, panted out—

'You guv me *this*, sir!'

The old gentleman reined up when he saw the gleam of gold.

'Hey, hey,' he said—'don't believe I did. Never made a mistake about money in my life. Yet I must, or how could *you* have got it? No, I didn't. I'm up to your tricks. It's brass, and you want to be paid for shamming honest. No, it isn't,' the old man added, when he had examined the coin, and, to make assurance doubly sure, had found that a half-sovereign was lacking in the pinch of change he took out of his waistcoat-pocket. 'Well, there's sixpence for you now—and, after all, it's more than you've earned. I suppose, though, you'll expect me to give you something extra; so—give me back the sixpence—here's a shilling for you.'

'Thankee, sir. I'm wery much obliged,' said Sam, touching his cap again, and turning away.

'Hi, boy, stop! What do you mean by going away like that? I suppose I must let you have the sixpence too. If you'd kept the half-sovereign, you'd have had nine and sixpence that you'd no kind of right to, and a bad conscience; now you've a shilling that you've *really* no right to, and an easy mind—and that must be worth a good

bit more than the other eight shillings. It's a bad plan—a very bad plan—paying people to be honest in that fashion. People ought to do what's right without a premium. However, you must keep it now that you have got it. Good-bye, boy. Be honest next time without thinking you'll get paid for it ;' and the old gentleman trotted off, leaving the possessor of 'an easy mind' also in delighted possession of a capital of eighteenpence.

'The old gent were a bit of a screw, I fancy,' was Sam's comment on this story ; 'and he worn't fair, besides, because I didn't want him to give me nuffink ; but I see there was sense in what he said. Father and mother used to say jest the same—on'y they said it in a nicer sort o' way.'

At the lodging-house at which Sam slept that night, he heard some of his fellow-lodgers talking about what they had made by 'working sprats.'

'Sprats was jest in, you see, sir,' Sam explained to me. 'They comes in with the Lord Mayor. Some says that it ain't lawful to eat 'em till he's 'ad fust feed off 'em at his feast. That's nonsense, in course ; but he might go further and fare wuss. Fried sprats of a cold night is as tasty and as fillin' a meal as a man 'ad need to 'ave. Folks says it's vulgar to eat 'em ; but I don't care about that. I'm vulgar myself, though, thank God, I can keep a banker now-a-days. And where'll you see a prettier fish than them plump little silver things? Them as turns up their noses at 'em when they're sprats, becos they're so common that down in Essex they uses 'em for muck, relishes the sprats, I've heard, when they're turned into

anchovies and sardines. It's queer that folks can't believe their own mouths, but must wait for other folks to tell 'em what it's proper to say a thing tastes like.'

On the morning after that night's sojourn in the lodging-house, Sam invested part of his capital in a basket, and another in a joint-purchase at Billingsgate of a 'chuck' of sprats; and on sprats he managed to make a living until the season was over.

Afterwards he engaged himself to a costermonger as 'barker;' and the costermonger, I have no doubt, was very glad to get so shrill-voiced, sharp-eyed, industrious, civil, a little barker. He had no objection either to Sam's honesty, when *he* reaped the benefit of it. Sam could be trusted not to take a penny more than his fair 'bunse,' when left to sell off his master's remnant stock; but he could not anyhow be got to tell his master's customers what he knew to be lies. He unconsciously meted and weighed out to them many a lie in fruit and vegetables, before he was initiated into the mystery of 'slang' weights and measures—half-pound weights beaten out to look like pound-weights, quart-measures with bottoms so thick as only to hold a pint and a half, &c. When he was initiated, Sam set up his back. 'Why, you young gonoph,' reasoned his master, 'the shopkeepers does it, and charges full prices; and hain't *we* a right to, when we sells thinx cheap at people's very doors? They charges ye more for the slangs than they does for the t'others, so, ye see, the slangs is the superior article, Sam,' added the master, hoping to muddle and muzzle his barker with his joke; but Sam was not to be muddled or muzzled. If shop-

keepers did what was mean, that was no reason why he should have a hand in doing what was mean too.

'I was sorry to leave old Ted,' Mr. Mixon informed me. 'I was gittin' used to him, and him and his old woman had treated me uncommon well, and he'd put me up to thinx in the way o' business that was of use to me, and said he'd make a man of me. The costers and the costers' women is often wery kind to their boys. It's their hinterest in course, but, let alone that, I'd taken a likin' to old Ted. But I worn't goin' to do what I knew was wrong. 'Tworn't much I knew about right and wrong in them days, but I knew this much, that it couldn't be right to take the money for a pound o' 'taties, an' on'y give 'alf a pound. "Well," says Ted, "well, Sam," says he, "if you won't stay, I can't make ye, and there's lots o' boys I can 'ave my pick out on. But some 'ow I'd rather you'd stayed on—you've a way with ye the women like. You're a flat, Sam, for all you seem so sharp sometimes. If you think you're a-goin' to make a livin' on the square, I wish you may git it, my tulip! 'Tain't to be done, Sam. I don't doubt you'll sell, an' you'll be sold, too;—them as buys of you will think ye b—— perliteful, an' then they'll laugh at ye, Sam. But I don't bear malice, Sam. If you wants to start on your own hook—that's what it comes to, I s'pose—I'll lend ye a trifle for stock-money. I don't doubt you'll pay me back, though I can't tumble to your barrikin. I wish your old father and mother 'ad been funder. Much good *they* got by keepin' on the square. I'd 'a' made a man on ye, Sam."

Accordingly, Sam did start as a costermonger on his

'own hook'—and he was only a little younger than many a coster-lad who does the same. When still children, so far as years go, the young male costers take lodgings and female helpmates, and the young couples labour for the common living with a persistent, often cheerful, industry, that makes a feeling of half-respect temper one's shuddering regret that they should have been united so early, and in such a heathenish way. The poor girls claim the larger amount of our pity. They are generally true to their unfaithful little tyrants, who, nevertheless, are brutally jealous. The girls work even harder than the boys, but the small 'master of the house' spends the lion's share of the common earnings on smart Sunday dress, drink, gambling, 'sport,' and 'twopenny hops,' and threepenny theatre-galleries, to which the soon despised mistress is often only taken as a special favour.

Acute after a fashion, as pugilistic as game-cocks, law-defying, hard-working, often very cruel, very ignorant, and yet, in spite of their frequent brutality—of course I am describing a class in broad lines that do not admit of delicate shading—grateful for kindness, generally staunch friends to their fellows when in distress, and kind to the ponies and donkeys they drive, although sometimes they punch the heads of the women they live with; blurting out, moreover, in their dealings with the non-costermonger world, startling opinions as to the 'rights of things'—take 'em all round, the costermongers seem to me an independently peculiar people, piquantly inviting to those who *need* a peculiar people to stimulate their desire to make their fellow-creatures zealous of good works. Civil

Sam was, however, an exceptional costermonger. He had taken to the business quite young enough to become an expert buyer and salesman ; but still he had not been brought up in the traditions of the fraternity, and continued civil and honest after he had become a costermonger.

*'Quo semel est imbuta recens servabit odorem
Testa diu.'*

At first it seemed as if old Ted's prediction in reference to the impossibility of making a living 'on the square' would be fulfilled in Sam's case. He had to borrow capital at an interest of more than a thousand per cent. per annum. Before he could save money enough to buy a barrow, he had to pay a good deal more than its cost for the use of the one he hired. He would not palm off stinking fish on drunken people, half-fill a strawberry pottle with crushed leaves, mix bad apples and cherries with good, and then sell them as if all good ; prick his oranges, boil his oranges and plums ; or use a weight or measure that could not have stood the periodical inspection, which made a good many of the shopkeepers—who looked down upon Sam as a 'low character'—tremble. His fellow-costers could not make him out. He did not care for beer, or boxing, or running, or skittles, or cards, or tossing, or 'hops,' or dog-fighting, or rat-killing, or pigeon-fancying, or assisting as an outsider at the Red House and Hornsey Wood pigeon-matches. Sam sometimes went, on business, to the metropolitan racecourses ; occasionally he recreated himself, in his sober fashion, at

the theatre ; like most costermongers, he abstained from work and dressed smart on Sundays. But then Sam went to church ! and Sam never swore ! He never preached, except in the way of example ; but his mates, nevertheless, called him the Parson. He was a mystery to them. Some said that he was a 'gallus soft,' and some that he was a sneaking spy. Sam would have been sent to Coventry by his mates, had it not been for the sour kind of respect which they could not help feeling for him, in spite of the opprobrious terms in which they characterized him behind his back ; for Sam, though honest and inoffensive, was keen, and an 'ugly customer' when any one attempted to ride rough-shod over him, and likewise for the hearty way in which he not only joined them in the 'raffles,' &c., got up for distressed members of the brotherhood, but also—when he had begun to save money, diminished his earnings, without any chance of personal benefit—for costers who had 'come to grief.' Precarious gains and improvident habits make such cases of distress very common amongst London street-sellers. It is said that three continuous days of downpouring rain in London will bring ten thousand times as many street-sellers very near to the verge of starvation.

But I am anticipating matters. Sam gradually advanced from the 'prickle' and the 'shallow' and the head-basket to the hired hand-barrow, and so on to the owned barrow—dealing in the strange variety of produce which London markets supply to the versatile commercial genius of London street distributors. Flowers 'all a-blowing, all a-growing ;' rhubarb, radishes, potatoes, onions, lettuces,

green peas, summer cabbages, scarlet runners, French beans, broad beans, 'colliflow-vers,' 'cow-cumbers,' sweet herbs, Brussels sprouts ; the rich variety of English fruits, English cobnuts and walnuts ; Turkey filberts, Brazil nuts, Barcelona nuts, cocoa-nuts ; almonds and raisins, oranges and lemons, dates, figs, Peninsular grapes purchased, packed in sawdust, from Duke's Place, pines from the West Indies, bananas from Madeira ; fish, wet and dry, from England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Holland, Norway ; hearthstone, great slabs of salt—these were *some* of the articles in which Sam dealt. Whatever was the article, Sam tried to supply his customers with the best specimen of it he could fairly offer at the price he asked, and always gave full weight and measure.

'A knave is only a fool with a circumbendibus,' says Coleridge ; 'honesty, after all, *is* the best policy,' the old man admitted, who also confessed that he had 'tried both ways.' Sam's pleasant face and civil tongue did something towards securing him a constantly increasing round of regular customers, but his fairness of dealing did more. He sometimes charged a little more than other costermongers charged, and therefore lost some customers amongst those who held the too prevalent, very idiotic belief, that mere absolute lowness of price constitutes cheapness ; but a good many people soon learnt that both Sam and his goods could be trusted ; and his 'connection' widened like a circle in water. Whilst old Ted, who had confidently prophesied Sam's failure, was still painfully propelling a hand-barrow, Sam was able to go to 'Smiffle Races,'—*i.e.*, the cattle market, on Friday after-

noon, and purchase a smart donkey, and the donkey was soon superseded by a still handsomer little fast-trotting pony. The harness was brass-mounted, and Sam kept the brass so brightly polished, the leather so neatly black, the fast-trotter so sleek and conscientiously groomed, the knowing-looking little cart so clean and gaily painted,—and the driver, moreover, was always so spruce and ‘civil spoken,’ that Sam was regarded as an ‘eligible young man’ by the sprucest servants in the shopless streets which constituted the, comparatively, ‘genteel’ portion of Sam’s ‘connection.’ They would have turned up their noses at most costermongers, even if the costermongers had been disposed to persecute them with matrimonial addresses, but they did not call Sam a costermonger. As soon as he reined up the fast-trotter before their doors, they would run in to their mistresses with a ‘Please’m, the general dealer has called—what do we want to-day, mum?’ Sam was almost as great a favourite, in a different way, with the mistresses as he was with the maids. He was commissioned to procure geese for Michaelmas Day, turkeys for Christmas Day, fowls for other special occasions, and fruit and fish and vegetables that he did not keep in stock, for invalids; and he always supplied articles both so cheap and so good that the unconscionable mistresses made him a ‘general dealer’ on their behalf for all kinds of things that were utterly out of his line. ‘There was one lady as got me to buy a cradle for her, and another a warming-pan,’ said grinning Sam.

Sam married one of the nattiest of the maid-servants, and took her to preside over the coals-and-greens shed of

which he had become the proprietor. A coals-and-greens shed is the *ne plus ultra* of most costermongers' ambition, but it was not to be the limit of Sam's success. At first he left his wife and a boy to manage the business of the shed, whilst he still took his rounds behind the fast-trotting pony; but the business of the shed increased so that Sam had to stay at home, and hire another hand.

He has quite a handsome greengrocer's shop, with knobbed and polished brass-rails, &c., in a leading East-end thoroughfare now, and keeps three horses; but his prosperity has not spoiled him. Mrs. Mixon, perhaps, is a trifle bumptious and grasping; but Sam is as civil, and honest, and kind-hearted as ever. There is no man in the parish, though it contains the business-places of some very wealthy non-residents, who subscribes more liberally and ungrudgingly to all kinds of parish charities than Mr. Mixon—if only he can be appealed to out of hearing of Mrs. Mixon, and be got to commit himself to a definite sum before he has had a chance of consulting her. Mrs. Mixon, ex-maid of all work, has become, as she thinks, 'aristocratic' in her views, and is of opinion that if people are poor, of course it's their own fault, and so it's a sin, and only 'makes 'em sarcy,' if 'respectable people as 'as al'ays paid their way, an' got ten times the money now some o' them shabby-genteels that thinks theirselves sich swells can bless 'emselves with,' put their hands in their pockets to 'elp sich riff-raff.'

'They didn't arn the money—so why should they git it?' says Mrs. Mixon.

Such talk is not pleasing to Mr. Mixon, but he stands

rather in dread of the sharp tongue of Mrs. Mixon, who has been a shrewdly-good wife to him ; so it is well to get him to put his name down on a subscription list before he has had an opportunity of 'talking the matter over' with his wife. There is a comical mixture of satisfaction and fearful foreboding on his countenance when he has put down his name for a handsome amount. He knows that he will 'catch it,' but he knows also that the thing cannot be undone ; and so he returns to the inevitable lecture with a cheerfulness which is not altogether feigned.

I will merely add one little sample of Mr. Mixon's kindness, as I heard it related, by no means in terms of praise, by Mrs. Mixon.

'M.'s as good a 'usband as a woman need wish to 'ave, 'owever genteel she may 'ave been brought up,' said Mrs. M. 'And he knows his business too, I don't deny—so far as buyin' goes ; but when it comes to sellin', though you mightn't think it, sir, of me as 'ad never to stand behind a counter afore I married M., the business 'ud go to rack and ruin if I wasn't to keep my eyes about me. He's sharp in a sort o' way, is M., an' yet he's silly too, though he *is* my 'usband. Why, sir, one day, when we'd the other shop, M. was standin' outside servin', an' there was a lot o' women about pickin' out their pertaturs. There was one draggle-tail as I kept my eye on, as well as I could servin' inside. She looked as if she didn't know the taste o' meat, an' she'd two or three o' her beggar-brats 'angin' on to 'er. She was sich a time, an' she looked so scared when she see *me* a-lookin' at her, that I felt sure she was

up to no good. Presen'ly I see her slip a pertatur into her skirts, an' out I shouted. For a wonder M. see her too, and cotched her 'and, an' pulled out a bag with a good four pounds o' pertaturs in it, that M. 'ad let 'er prig afore his wery nose. Out she busts screechin' an' cryin' for mercy, an' talkin' about the lots o' 'ungry kids she'd got at 'ome. "Send for the pollis, M.—give her in charge this minute, M.," says I. But M. wouldn't 'ave it. He gives her a look, and then he gives her a lectur', and pretty strong he pitched it—I'll say that for him, for M. can't abide sich mean ways—but then—could you believe it, sir?—*he give her the pertaturs* ! I never was so disgusted in all my born days, an' so I told him, right out afore all the people in the shop. I felt downright ashamed o' my 'usband—makin' hisself sich a soft afore them as was sure to take adwantage of it. And M. worn't content with that. He must find out where that old 'ussy lived, an' bother his 'ead to git her work. If she 'adn't been sich a old fright—fit a'most to be his mother—I should ha' thought there was more in it than M. was willin' to own to. We've got two of her boys a-workin' for us now. I don't say they don't do their work, an' I hain't caught 'em priggin' *yet*. They knows I looks after 'em pretty sharp. But we shall see some day who's right. What's bred in the bone, you know, sir, won't come out o' the flesh. It ain't respectable to emply sich vulgar riff-raff in a shop like ourn. Them's my opinions, sir, and I don't care who knows 'em.'

XXX.

THE PATERNOSTERS.

HOW on earth can it be made for the money? is a remark often made, when the money has been paid, by the purchasers of 'cheap, natty-looking' articles. Such articles, in reality, are *not* cheap, because they are not really *made*, but simply put together with sufficient showiness and adhesiveness to last until they *have* been bought. When the bloom has suddenly vanished, and the dissolution of continuity suddenly takes place, the buyers who, fancying that they had got unheard-of bargains, had bestowed cheap pity on the makers of the cheap wares, proceed to lavish unmeasured abuse upon those 'knavish' people. But if the conditions under which such scamped work is 'finished' at the East End were generally known, a good many of its disappointed—after all, the prices given being taken into consideration, not really defrauded—purchasers would still, I think, continue to pity 'the poor creatures who made it.'

One day a ragged, dirty little toddler—so little that, after having drummed in vain upon the door, she was obliged to ask a passer-by to use the knocker for her—came to my house, and told the servant that she had been sent to ‘fetch the parson.’

When I went out to the poor little woman, she told me that I must come at once, because mother was taken so bad—father would have come, but he was too busy, she was to say, and she must hurry back to her work—poor little toddler!—so would I come at once, please, because, please, she’d to show me where it was?

She gave me the name of her mother, and the name of the street to which she was to take me; but I recognized neither. Paternoster was the surname—not so exceptional, I have found, as I thought it then.

As I walked back with the poor little thing, I could see that, anxious as she was about her mother, and impressed though she was with the necessity of returning speedily to her ‘work,’ she could not help enjoying the brief respite from it which she had got, and also the ‘sensational’ importance of having been ‘sent for the parson.’ She piloted me into a stifling little street leading out of the Old Bethnal Green Road. The street was unpaved, dusty, pitted with cracked, desiccated mud-puddles, and littered with stinking herring-heads and wilted outside cabbage-leaves. Most of the mean, black-jaundiced houses on both sides had weavers’ many-paned, horizontally-oblong casements in their upper floors, although silk-weavers no longer constituted the bulk of the street’s swarming, struggling, half-starving population. My

little guide steered me up a filthy, crooked, crazy staircase to an upper floor so lighted, and into a room that smelt of sawdust, shavings, glue, shellac, rancidly-oiled metal, and all kinds of rankly or mustily malodorous muddle. This was the workshop of the Paternosters—their kitchen and meal-room, also the bed-room of some of them—the rest huddled at night in the smaller inner room, in which, the door being ajar, I could hear poor Mrs Paternoster gasping for a breath of fresh air.

As, soon as we entered the workshop, my guide, little Polly Paternoster, went back to her place at the bench, and hopped on to the dirty, splintered egg-box which brought her up to the level of her 'work,' like a weary little trained finch, compelled to begin drawing up its little bucket once more. Small as Polly Paternoster was, there was a smaller Jane Paternoster hard at work next to her at the bench. Hard at work, but, oh, so wearily at work. Poor little Jane seemed to grudge the 'outing' which Polly had had. If Jane had only known where the parson lived, *she* would have been sent for him, because Polly's labour was a trifle more valuable than Jane's, and in that family the slightest difference in receipts was of serious importance. A boy of thirteen, another of twelve, and two other girls a year or two older than Polly, were the rest of the young workers—poor stunted little creatures all of them, and with that dreary half-knowing, half-stupefied look which premature care prints on children's faces. The father was stooping to take a glue-pot off the fire when I went in, and until he turned round, I thought that *he* was a boy too—he was

so narrow across the back. His apron was ragged, but the trousers it professed to protect were more tattered still. Between his high, cramped shoulders, which looked as if they would soon meet beneath his nose, there drooped one of the saddest faces I ever saw in my life—the face of a thoroughly beaten man. Not that there was any acute sorrow visible in it. The eyes were dull, and the general expression of the haggard, unshaven face was simply stolid. But a dismal biography was written in its dirty crow's-feet and crossing wrinkles—a life of daylong struggles for daily bread continued for years, with an ever-haunting anxiety that, when the high-pressure work, in which no workman's pride could be taken as *honest* work, at last was done, even the wretched price given for such work might not be forthcoming, however he might wheedle the shopkeepers who made their profits out of his necessities and their customers' passion for 'bargains:' a life that had now become utterly hopeless, since his trade was growing worse and worse—the only trade to which his six surviving children could be brought up, the trade in which his other children had died, and in which his wife was dying.

'She's in there, sir,' said the cabinet-maker, pointing over his shoulder to the inner room, as he went back to his bench with the glue-pot.

'Thank you, sir, for coming,' panted the poor woman, when I had seated myself beside her wretched bed. Ill as she was, she was fitting in the flimsy blue lining of a cheap work-box. 'Yes, sir, I'm bad—*very* bad, the doctor says.'

‘What is it?’

‘Something the matter with my heart or my lungs, or both of ’em. I can’t make out exactly what from what the doctor says. Of course, I can’t expect him to waste much talk on me for what the parish gives him, and such a lot of us to look after. But he’s a kind man, sir, for all that. If he could only cure me so as I could get up, that’s as much as I could expect, but I shall never get up again, though he says so, he’s a kin’—’

She dropped her work and pressed both her hands on her left breast. Her face and lips turned ashy pale, and the flimsy bed-covering heaved and fell as if a little piston were throbbing up and down beneath it.

‘It’s over now, sir,’ she said, resuming her work. ‘I’m often took like that. Sometimes I feel so faint that I put my hand to my side in a fright and can’t feel a mite o’ beat, and then at other times my heart will begin to thump as if it’d burst my ribs out.’

‘Had not you better give over working for a little? Would not you feel a little easier if I lifted that box off the bed?’

‘No, sir, thankee—I might in my fingers, but I shouldn’t in my mind. I’ll do what I can whilst I last. Look at *them* out there.’

‘But, surely, your husband wouldn’t force you to work, ill as you are?’

‘*Force me!* poor feller. ’Taint *him* that forces me. Look at my old man, and them poor kids, hard at it from six in the morning to ten at night, except at meals—and *they* don’t last long, or when my old man is carting the

things about to the slaughter-houses—and that's harder work than the bench, and more disheartenin'.

'Slaughter-houses !' I exclaimed, 'I didn't know that your husband made anything for the butchers.'

'The cheap furnitur' shops,' she explained, with a glance of astonishment at my ignorance: 'drapers and the rest of 'em, that grind Englishmen's bones to make their bread. And them bazaars are often just as bad. I used to cart about desks and work-boxes and that like to them, when I could get about, and sometimes have to take less than the stuff had cost, because I must take back some kind o' money. Look at my poor old man and them poor children,' she added; 'some of 'em's gone first, thank God'—and then she broke down, sobbing.

When she was a little calmed, I said—

'Mrs Paternoster, do you know what your name means?'

I made the remark in a vague hope that I might be able somehow to utilize it for her comfort; but, as is often the case when one tries to use sacred words as a kind of *Abracadabra*, I was at first quite unsuccessful.

'No, sir !' she answered, utterly unable to discover the relevancy of what she plainly thought an unfeelingly trivial question.

It means "our Father"—it is the beginning of the Lord's Prayer in Latin.'

'Is it, sir? I never knew that before. But what do you mean, sir? I always say Our Father, and I've taught the children to say it too. That's all the schoolin' they've had—that and the Ten Commandments, and the 'Postles' Creed. If we could spare the money, and God knows

we can't, we couldn't spare their help in gettin' it, and so we can't send 'em to school.'

'Well, in your hardest struggles, have not you always had daily bread of some kind—however coarse or scanty?'

'No, *that* we haven't! Many and many's the time we've gone without. My poor children! And what better have they to look to? Things are getting worse instead of better. If it didn't seem mean to want to get away and leave 'em in it, I should be glad to think I was goin' soon where the other poor things is—but they ain't poor now, thank God. And then there's my poor old man!'

And again the poor woman began to sob so bitterly that I grew alarmed.

'He seems a very civil, hard-working man,' I answered, blurting out the first commonplace I could think of at all consolatory.

'Yes, *that* he is,' she sobbed, trying hard to gulp down her sobs, 'and when me and John was courtin', he could hold his head up, and look any man in the face, and give him back his answer. The spirit hadn't been taken out of him by them slaughterers—begging and praying they'd buy what him and the kids and me have been working our fingers off over. He was earning good wages for good work then, and now, if he could get such work again—which he couldn't, try as he might,—I've seen him fit to cry because he couldn't do it. His hand is out, he says, and that must be a sore downcome for a man.'

‘Does he make the best use of what you do earn?’ I inquired, in the character of moral censor.

Best use!’ answered the wife in scorn. ‘He’d be puzzled to make a bad use of it, poor John! If slaving your arms and your legs off, and then going without grub, is wasting your money, that’s how John wastes his. He never did drink, but now it’s often he don’t taste a half-pint of beer from week’s end to week’s end.’

The poor woman’s ardent advocacy of her husband’s moral character had brought on palpitation of the heart once more. When I had done the little I could to relieve her, I remained as still as I could in the stifling room—meanwhile watching the wearily persistent industry that was going on, without a smile, almost without a word—except a rare feeble attempt at a ‘bit of fun,’ or young-sisterly snarl, between little Jane and little Polly—in the hot outer room, whose atmosphere did not purify that of ours by its many-scented, sluggish overflowings.

Both for the invalid’s sake and my own, I tried to open the single small back-window of the inner room; but it was immovable. If I could have opened it, however, the air it would have let in might have been even worse than what we were breathing. The grimy window looked out on a tiny, walled-in, ink-black backyard—so far as its colour could be discovered in the midst of its piled-up heaps of ashes and garbage of all kinds, sweltering beneath the smoky sunlight of a grilling East-end summer’s day.

When Mrs Paternoster could speak once more, I asked

her whether her husband had been in what she called 'good work' when they were married.

'He'd just lost it, sir, but no fault of his own, and I thought he'd get it again. If I'd known he wouldn't, I wouldn't have drawed back. A girl likes to get married anyhow to the chap she's fond of; and John's been a good husband s'far's ever he could. What he could do, he's done, poor feller. But it's been a hard life. Ah, sir, it's a easy thing for them as are sure of it to talk about praying to God for your daily bread!'

If I had told her that I still believed that God *would* give their daily bread to all who humbly asked Him for it, and did their best to earn it, should I have been telling the truth? Even so, could I have explained to her satisfaction, or my own, how it was that she and hers had often gone without daily bread? Instead, I said,—

'If you *have* been forced to go without literal daily bread, nothing can rob you of the Bread of Life, if you will only take it.' I was not sure that I should be understood, but the woman's eyes instantly lighted up.

'Ah, sir,' she cried, 'talk to me about Christ—that's why I sent for you. He seems nearer like than God. I read about Him in the Testament, when I've a chance, but that ain't often, and John can't spare time to read to me, and the children can't read. I should like to go of a Sunday to church or chapel or anywheres, just to hear about Him, but we've to work best part of Sunday to get along anyhow, and then in the evenin' John says we hain't clothes fit for church. "Why, John," says I, "you don't mind your rags when you go about week-

days." "That don't matter," says he, "'cept that the poorer you looks, the more they screws you down. Let the kids have a breath of air when they can get it, Molly." And so when it's dusk, we slip out and slink about the streets as if we was ashamed of ourselves, though it's no particular harm we're doin'—it'd be a good thing for the children if they *could* get a breath of fresh air once in a way, but there ain't much o' that where we can get to. I'd rather be in church, if it was only for the quiet and the rest. But there I'm talking as if I was about again, and yet I'm sure I never shall be. John used to be a church-goer, but he's got hardened against the Bible, poor feller, because life's been so hard to him. "Oh, yes," he'll say, in a pet like, "I don't doubt God's good to them as He's made well-off, but what's that to *us*?" But it's different with me. Now my only comfort is to hear about Him as was poor, too, and yet's waiting for poor folks in the happy place he's got ready for 'em.'

'Yes, think of what He suffered!'

'Ah, *that* He did, or how could any of us have a hope of a better world than this? And that would be a poor look-out, I expect, for most of us. And yet, sir—'

'Well, and yet?'

'I'm half afraid to say it. It seems as if I wasn't thankful to Him for what He's done. And yet sometimes, when I'm half-choked—'specially on a day like this—I can't help thinking that if He *hadn't* where to lay his head, He could wander about in the fresh air and pick lilies of the field. And then, if there *was* such lots of bad men set against Him, He'd some—men, and women,

and children—that was fonder of Him than anybody's been fond of anybody before or since.'

'“And they all forsook Him and fled,” and, patient as He was, He was forced to cry, “My God, my God, why hast *thou* forsaken me?” What loneliness that any one has felt could be like *that*—to *Him*? I don't wonder at your feeling lonely, but at any rate you have your husband and children close to you. You love them, and I have no doubt they love you.'

'Yes, sir, *that* we do, but then you see, sir, people that are driven about from pillar to post like us hain't no time to be *fond* of one another. If you don't get snappish to one another, you get hard somehow. I mustn't talk for a bit—I want quietin'—read me a chapter, please, sir—out of the Revelations.'

The Apocalypse—I am not the first to remark—is the favourite book of believers in the Bible who are worsted in the humblest of life's struggles. *They* find no fault—they find a charm—in its material images: in splendour and purity so utterly beyond the scope of their experience in any way as to become ideal to *them*. They know nothing of the controversies that have raged, and go on raging, over the Apocalypse's predictions; the prophecy *they* read in it is one of solace after affliction, of a happy home for ever with Christ for those who sincerely, however ignorantly, wish to do His will.

I opened Mrs Paternoster's Testament, turned over the leaves, and began almost at random at the fourth verse of the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation:—

'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and

there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain : for the former things are passed away.'

' Ah, sir, that's beautiful,' said the poor woman faintly, but with a face that shone with joy, as if it had been transfigured. ' I feel as if I could go to sleep now, and dream I was in heaven ; and if I was to wake there, how happy ! I feel as if I could lay on my left side again, my heart's going so easy.'

She struggled over on to her left side, and fell asleep ; whilst I went out of the room on tiptoe, and told Paternoster that it would be well to let his wife take her rest for some time without disturbance. A useless caution ; the next day I learnt that when Paternoster next spoke to his wife he found that she had entered into the rest that can never be broken.

'THE SQUARE DOLLYWOMAN.'

IN one of the parishes in which I have served, in order to raise a sum of money for parochial purposes, the incumbent, a brother curate, and myself resolved to become systematically sturdy beggars—to divide the parish into three districts, take one each, and make a personal appeal to every householder therein whom we could suppose to have any money, much or little, to spare for charitable purposes.

It was in this way I became acquainted with Mrs Phipps, who kept the rag-and-bottle and 'dolly' shop in Blackberry Lane. That has a very rural sound, and once upon a time, I suppose, the dark, dirty, built-in thoroughfare so called was a grassy, briar-dotted, bee and butterfly-haunted country lane, winding between meadows fragrant with May and cows' breath ; but anything less country-like than Blackberry Lane is now, and long has been, it would

be hard to fancy. And Mrs Phipps's shop is, perhaps, the most unrural feature even where there are so many of them. A rusty gibbet projects from the lintel of the shop-door, and from the end of the gibbet dangles a grinning, goggle-eyed wooden negress, with cataleptic arms and legs, and arrayed in a flaring-bordered night-cap and gown of what was once perhaps white calico. The panes of the shop-window are blinded with bills, announcing, by bloated red and black figures in their centre, the prices per lb. which the proprietress gives for the very miscellaneous articles in which she deals. These bills are bossed with a coloured cartoon depicting a happy family beaming with delight around a vast, holly-sprigged Christmas pudding, which, the accompanying letter-press informs the passer-by, Materfamilias has procured for her ecstatically astonished husband and little ones simply by selling at this 'emporium' what she once threw away as rubbish. Against one of the door-posts leans, pasted on a board, what looks like a Royal proclamation. It is headed V.R., with the Royal arms sprawling between the Royal initials. But on examination V. R. turns out to be an integral portion of another of Mrs Phipps's advertisements, which must thus be read :—'*Ve are* giving' so and so for such and such. The inside of the shop is a filthy chaos. There is not a single clean thing in it. The few visible portions of the floor, walls, ceiling, &c., are, perhaps, even dirtier than the piled, leaning, and hanging wares, almost literally of all sorts, by which the greater portion of their superficies is hidden. The air is foul with the scent of musty, fusty rags, bedding, and

wearing apparel, mildewed boots and shoes, horse collars and traces, rancid kitchen stuff, perspiring candle-ends, putrescent bones, and a mouldy *et-cætera* of seemingly utterly used-up 'trash.' Heaps and boxfuls and trayfuls of old metal block the way; fragments of crumpled sheet-lead, short lengths of twisted leaden pipe, pewter measures and trenchers and basins, lidless tin kettles, a battered zinc-pail, copper nails, a crushed copper carboy, brass name-plates, bell-pulls, beer-taps and water-taps, leprous with verdigris, and steel and iron chisels, saws, hammer-heads, locks, keys, bolts, one-legged tongs, pokers with the bottom off, horse-shoes, donkey-shoes, chain-links, segments of cog-wheels, screws, nails, scraps of hoop, &c., &c., so rusty and dusty that you cannot help fancying they must have lain for a hundred years at the bottom of the sea, and then for another century, undisturbed, in Mrs Phipps's shop. They are *so* rusty that it is hard to believe that any sound metal can be left within the scabby flakes of corrosion that crumble into red powder at the slightest touch.

Glass is supposed to be transparent, or at least translucent, but Mrs Phipps's glass can claim neither attribute: bulbous druggists' bottles, with gilt cabalistic characters almost obliterated, and void of the coloured water that once made them look so gay; graduated medicine-bottles, physic-phials, with their labels half scratched off, or still pasted round their waists, or sloping in a very crumpled condition from their necks; wine bottles, beer bottles, pickle jars; long-necked scent-bottles, with specks of gilding still clinging to their cut bodies; square-built scent-bottles,

with Jean Maria Farina's sprawling signature still dimly discernible upon them. That is a curious signature to see in Mrs Phipps's shop—except that its stencches rival those of Cologne. To match the empty druggists' bottles, there is a little colony of empty, banded, white druggists' jars, scrolled with 'Leeches,' 'Tamarinds,' &c. To match the pewter pots, there is a beer-engine, minus one handle, and the china encasements of two of the others. But 'matching' is not, by any means, the strong point in Mrs Phipps's stock. A conscientious inventory-maker for it could very seldom lighten his labour by dittoes. Almost smothered in a drift of ropes' ends, stands an old-fashioned chest of drawers, with the veneer chipped off at the corners, and tags of frayed string doing duty for the long-vanished brass handles. All the drawers are crammed with property of the most bewildering variety and infinitesimal value. On the top of the chest of drawers lies an anatomized iron bedstead, and on that lies a bridgeless, stringless, bowless violin ; and beside the fiddle stands a domed canary cage, whose brass wires doubtless once gleamed dazzlingly, but now are as thickly furred with black dirt as if it had been hanging for months in an ever-smoking chimney. Mrs Phipps also occasionally deals in a small way in books, pictures, and engravings. It must be *very* occasionally, or else she must get rid of her new purchases very expeditiously. So long as I have known her shop, it has displayed the same brown-measled engraving of Napoleon crossing the Alps, at full gallop, over snow which ever-accumulating grime has turned into soot ; the same frameless oil paintings of semi-obliterated Nobodies

and Nowheres ; the same little piles of unreadable books in blue boards, with curly-edged leaves clotted together with smoky dust. It is not a pleasant task to inspect Mrs Phipps's little literary stock. When you open the books, and then shut them with a clap to free them of their dust, it flies out in such a cloud that you are half choked ; and as you turn the faded, freckled pages that seem at first to have as much life of any kind in them as a yellow mouldering shroud, you find that they *have* life in them—of a disagreeably crawling kind that makes you drop the volume as you might drop a hot cinder you had unwittingly taken up.

After all, I have only hinted at the 'infinite variety' of Mrs Phipps's wares. Malodorous dirt is the one characteristic common to them all ; and Mrs Phipps seemed to me a fit dealer in such wares when I crossed her threshold. She, too, was very dirty. There was a look of cunning also on her fat face that prejudiced me against her. I made up my mind that she had grown fat on the bargains she had screwed out of the poorest of the poor. There was a self-hugging defiance of all considerations that did not affect herself in the way in which she tightened the embrace in which her fat arms held her feather-bed bust, that made it plain I should not get a farthing out of her.

So I thought—but I felt very much ashamed of myself when I had explained my business to Mrs Phipps. She asked sharp questions—*so* sharp as to imply, or rather to indicate *sans phrase*, that, at starting, it was an open question with her whether I was or was not 'cadging,' under false pretences, for my own benefit. Her nearest

approach to an apology for such an imputation was not very complimentary: 'I'm not blamin' ye, sir. If you can git the money out o' them as are flats enough to give it, why shouldn't ye? Parsons must live, and they've got families to keep like other folks, and most o' the parsons about 'ere, they say, is as poor as church mice. I'm not blamin' ye, sir. It's a shame you should be druv to it—*that's* all I say. Sich as you does all the work, an' them as does nothin' gits the pay—gits made deacons, an' *harch*-deacons, an' all kind o' harches. *Harches!* what right's any parson to be called a *harch*? There ain't one o' them could build a bridge, I'll go bail. I'm not blamin' ye, sir. I pity you poor parsons about 'ere—*that's* what I say. Why, I s'pose *you* now, sir—may go on slavin' and cadgin' all your born days, and never git made even so much as a deacon of—let alone the harches.'

I thought it would merely puzzle, and, possibly, still further prejudice, Mrs Phipps if I informed her that, at any rate, I could claim *priest's* orders; and so I went on with my work of explanation. When at last she *was* satisfied that I was, *bonâ fide*, collecting money for the benefit of her poor neighbours, her contribution to the parochial fund was, in proportion to her means, one of the most liberal we obtained.

After that first interview, brief in spite of the cross-questionings with which she had protracted it, I got to know a good deal more about Mrs Phipps. I found that she was called in the neighbourhood the 'square dollywoman.' *Round* would have been a far more appropriate adjective so far as figure went, I thought; and one day

I asked Mrs Phipps how she had obtained her curious title.

‘Why, you see, sir, I *keeps* a dolly—lends money to poor folks on things they couldn’t pop at the reg’lar pawns, an’ I tries not to be quite so ‘ard on ‘em as some of the dollies is, and I’m freer-‘anded in buyin’. So that’s why they calls me *square*, I s’pose. I’ve to keep my eyes open though, both with them I lends to and them I buys of, or they wouldn’t hact on the square with *me*. I’ve got a name for good natur’, and they’d take adwantage of it, if I’d let ‘em. I don’t mind doin’ a kind haction now an’ then, but I won’t be *done*. If it’s kindness, it’s kindness; and if it’s business, it’s business. I won’t be diddled out o’ the credit o’ doin’ a kind haction, an’ made to believe I’m only a-doin’ business. When they tries that game on with me, my back’s soon up, I can tell ye, sir. Fust time you come to see me, sir, thinks I to myself, “If the poor gen’leman would only humble hissself to ask me straight-forward, I’d give him, willin’, what I could for hissself; but if he’s too proud to take it that way, I ain’t a-goin’ to let him think he’s gammoned me into believin’ it’s for the p’rish’ners.” That’s why I was so short with ye, at fust, sir, till I’d made out the rights of what you’d come about.’

‘What kind of things do the poor people pledge?’

‘Oh, all sorts—some as I could ‘ardly git back the money I lent on ‘em for—and that’s where they tries to do me.’

‘And what do you charge?’

‘Why, at most of the dolly shops, sir, they charge jist the same whether a thing’s in a week or whether it’s in a

day—twopence on the shillin'—that's the charge. But that seems a hawful lot for the poor critturs to pay ; so I'll only charge a 'a'penny, say, if the thing's taken out next day, and a penny if it's out by the middle of the week, and so on. It's puzzlin' work makin' reductions when it's only a penny or so you've lent. A ha'penny on the twopence is what the other dollies charge, whether it's for a week or for a day ; but if they're people I know, I'll only charge a farden, up to fourpence, and sometimes I won't charge nothin', when they pays back within the week—that's accordin' to circumstances, of course. When folks are honest to my knowledge, and 'ard up and no mistake about it, it would go agin my conscience not to let 'em 'ave a few coppers now and then—'s long as they don't want to cheat me. If they'll leave what's worth the money they want, I'll let honest folks have it, though that ain't the way of the trade, for you may 'ave a thing as *was* jist worth the money 'anging on 'and till it ain't worth 'alf, let alone the interest. And sometimes I'll lend, when I know the poor critturs can't spare what they've brought even for a day, without takin' the thing in—rugs and sich, when it's bitter cold.* But they mustn't try to do me—make out that things I couldn't make no money out of is worth ten times as much as they want on 'em. Soon's ever I see they wants to do me, my back's up. "There," says I, and I gives 'em back their trumpery, "we won't 'ave

* 'And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge : in any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee.' (Deut. xxiv. 12, 13.)

no words. You can walk, soon's ever you please." And they do walk pretty brisk, but, bless you, some on 'em will try on the same game agin till I git right out o' patience with 'em. My temper's short, and I don't see why they should want to do me jest becos I've got more pity for 'em than most has.'

'What are the sums you generally lend?'

'Oh, twopences, and threepences, and fourpences, and sixpences, and so on up to a shillin'. 'Tain't often that I go beyond the bob. Sometimes it's 'alf-a-crown, but that's seldom. Seven and sixpence is the most I ever lent to any one at one time, and that was only once in my life.'

'But I suppose you have been asked for more?'

'Well, sir, you see the things that is mostly left with me is sich common stuff that the most owdacious of them as wants to borry on 'em wouldn't think of arskin' anythin' like that. And yet I *have* been arsked for out-of-the-way lots, too. Look at this flute now.'

She opened a drawer in the counter and took out of it a faded green-baize flute-case, and out of that the joints of a German flute, which when put together looked so very poor an instrument that I wondered any one should have thought it worth while to provide it with a case.

'Look at that now. I don't know whether you're a judge of sich things, but I've shown it to them as is, or shams to be, and they say it 'ud be dear at any money. And that's about my own opinion, though it wouldn't do for me to say so to everybody, if I ever want to sell it, which I don't mean to yet.'

'I suppose there's some history connected with the flute that has interested you.'

'Yes, there is, sir—though it's precious little I know about it. Though if you come to that, everything that's brought to me has a 'ist'ry as you call it, that must be hinterestin' to somebody. But about this flute. I was settin' in the shop as I might be now, when in there comes a tall, thin chap that didn't look jest the sort I'm used to. He was seedy enough, poor feller, but still there was a look about him that made me think he'd been used to somethin' a bit better sometime or other. He was dressed in black—coat an' trousers both—leastways they *had* been black when his hair was. His hair and his clothes looked 's if they'd grown grey together. Well, sir, he pulls this baize thing out of his pocket as carefully as if it was the preciousesest thing in the world, and looks over his shoulder, and then he puts it down on the counter without ever sayin' a word. I'd begun to pity the man, but then I thought it was plate he'd been a-priggin'. "No, no, my man," says I, "this ain't your shop. I ain't a fence, and if you don't slope precious quick, I'll send for the pollis to sarve you out for your imperence in bringin' a bad name on me, which I've never desarved none." He looks up astonished like, and then he puts his flute together, and give it me, and says, "Will you lend me a pound on this, ma'am?" I looks at it, and then I looks at him, and says I, I says, "I'd see you funder fust. Why, man, it's cracked, and you must be cracked, too, to think of sich a thing." I couldn't 'elp pityin' him agin—he looked so wexed—for the flute like he seemed to care more than he

did for hisself. It was easy to see that *he* vallied it at no end o' price, some reason or other, and forgot, poor crittur, that it worn't the same to everybody else it were to him. "My good man," says I, "if you want to make money out of your flute, you'd better sell it. I'll buy it if you're any-ways reasonable, but you must put a price upon it. I can't be buyer and seller both." "No, ma'am," says he, "I can't sell it," and then he goes on moonin' to hisself—"all gone, all gone but that—nothing left *they* ever saw but that. I can't sell my last thing that ever had sunshine on it." I thought the poor man was wandering; so to bring him to hisself, I says, "Why, there's the sun a-shinin' on your coat now, sir. If you won't name a price, I'll bid 'alf-a-crown for your flute, though, mind you, 'alf o' that is only out o' charity." "I thank you, ma'am," says he, civil and yet proud like, "but I did not ask for charity. I cannot sell my flute. Will you lend me," he goes on, droppin' humble agin, "sixpence on it?" "That I will," says I, "or a shillin', if you like." "No, ma'am," says he, "I fear that would not be fair to you. I forgot that the flute could not be to you what it is to me. I shall be able to pay sixpence sooner than I could pay a shilling, and so I shall get my flute back the sooner." He give a little smile when he said that, but if he'd made a joke, I couldn't see it, poor feller. Then he unscrewed his flute, and put the j'int's back into the green case, lingerin' over 'em jest as if they was his babbies he was buryin'. "You will please to take great care of this, ma'am, and not let any one tamper with it," says he when he give it me, as solemn as if he was trustin' me with a fortun'.

Thinks I, “Who’d want to, and if they did, what ’ud it matter?” But I says to him, as grave as I could, “All right, sir—I’ll look after that.” But that poor gen’leman, he looked so down in the mouth when he went out o’ the door, that I couldn’t ’elp callin’ after him, “Hi, stop a bit, sir,—you can take your flute, and I’ll trust to your word to pay me.” I’m *sure* he heard me, for he give a twitch in his shoulders, as if he was a-comin’ back, but he made believe not to hear me, and went on, and I’ve never seed him since. That’s more than three years ago, but even if I could git a customer for his flute—and at any rate, I could git more than a tanner for it—I wouldn’t sell it. I’ll keep it ’s long as I can, to give the poor gen’leman a chance of gittin’ it agin, if he does come back—he seemed so cut up at partin’ with it. If *that’s* all the ’appiness he’s got in the world, it would be a ’ard thing to rob him of it.’

XXXII.

‘OLE PIPPIN.’



WAS one day in Mrs Phipps's shop, when a hale-looking old man came in to dispose of a bagful of metallic odds and ends. He was a cheery old fellow, with full ruddy cheeks, and almost silvery hair ; but he had a habit of casting his eyes down and prying about whilst he was talking that made me suspicious of him at first ; when, however, I did catch sight of his clear blue eyes, there was such an honest look in them that I felt I must have made a mistake in his case as well as Mrs Phipps's in my first reading of character. We often do make such mistakes when we trust solely to conventionally accepted symptoms of dishonesty. Almost every calling engenders some trick of manner which may possibly admit of an unfavourable interpretation, if the observer rigidly applies to it his abstract notions of the way in which all kinds of people ought to behave. Persons who pride themselves

upon their knowledge in the matter of insight into character—their ability, as they phrase it, to ‘take stock of a fellow at first sight,’ are often ludicrously self-misled. Witness the false scents which detectives who have brought themselves to believe that everybody is a more or less cunning rogue often run off upon, with a comically earnest certainty that they are at the heels of the rascal who is ‘wanted.’ They hunt in London, whilst he is half way across the Atlantic. They rush to take the Cunard boat at Liverpool, and possibly brush against the man they are in quest of in the Strand, whilst they are entering the Hansom they have hailed in a hurry to convey them at a gallop to Euston Square, merely ‘confounding’ their quarry for getting in their way. The old man’s habit of casting down his eyes, I soon found, was one of these trade-caused tricks of manner—as innocent as the soberest sailor’s roll on shore.

‘Who is he, Mrs Phipps?’ I asked when the old man had gone out with the money she had paid him for his metal.

‘Oh! that’s ole Pippin, sir.’

‘And what is Mr Pippin’s business?’

The title I had given him greatly tickled Mrs Phipps. When she had finished laughing, she answered, ‘Bless you, sir, he ain’t *Mr* Pippin’ (bursting out in laughter again at the title she had emphasized). ‘Pippin ain’t his name—surname or Chris’n name. It’s the name he goes by. I can’t rightly say what his real name is. Though if you’d mind the neighbours, you’d say I’d ought to. Accordin’ to them, me and ole Pippin’s goin’ to

make a match of it. A likely thing, and him old enough to be my father ! Though he's a fine ole chap, ain't he, sir, for his years ? And he don't do badly neither. He ain't like the rest o' them shore-workers—a haul to-day, drunk as a sow to-morrer, and not a penny in their pockets day after. He's a righter notion o' the vally o' money than *that*, and he makes a sight, they say ; but then he's burdened hisself with sich a lot to spend it on that I might as well marry a viddiver as wanted somebody to 'elp keep a lot o' kids, as ole Pippin ; an' that oodn't suit my book, let alone his years, though no one can deny he carries 'em better than lots as ain't 'alf his age. I've got on a deal better since my fust ole man died than ever I did while he was livin', so I ain't a-goin to git another, 'cept I can better myself. What I make now I *have*, and can do as I like with ; but law, it's foolish nonsense talkin' like that. Ole Pippin's a deal too much sense to think o' sich a thing.'

At that time I did not know what 'shore-worker' meant, and so I had to ask for an explanation, which was thus given :—

'Them as goes grubbin' in the shores, when the tide will let 'em in, pickin' up whatever they can get 'old on. It seems a queer life, don't it, sir ? P'raps there's some on 'em routin' about under our feet now, jest like the rats. And the rats is wery dangerous, too, at times, down there, I've heared. It's a queer life, but there's money to be made at it, if the silly fellers had only the wit to keep it. All kind o' things—shillin's an' gold, too—they find in that filthy muck. But if you want to 'ear about that, you

should go an' 'ave a talk with ole Pippin. There ain't many's been at it longer than he 'ave, an' he's a pleasant ole feller to talk to, an' don't by any means objec' to the sound of his own voice.'

I was then comparatively unfamiliar with the strange variety of modes in which the inhabitants of this huge city pick up a living. The information that there was a class of men who earned what, but for their folly, would be a good living by groping about in the foul darkness of the London sewers excited my curiosity; and I willingly availed myself of Mrs Phipps's offer to make me acquainted with old Pippin.

In spite of his vagabondish calling and our common friend's little sneer at his loquacity, I found him to be an old man deserving of respect in more ways than one; and I think therefore that a brief account of his life and adventures may interest my readers.

I should premise that at the time of which I write the scientific modern system of metropolitan drainage was only dreamt of: a gigantic system which would be cheap even at its gigantic cost—if only, after having taken so much pains to purify one part of our river, we were not satisfied with defiling it a little lower down; if after having collected our sewage so that it *could* be utilized, we still did *not* utilize it, except in an infinitesimal degree—still treating as rubbish to be got rid of anyhow what might be made to produce wealth in comparison with which the richest hauls the old shore-workers ever fished out of the filthy flood would be trifles not worth counting.

Old Pippin's real name I found to be Frederick Smith. Why he was called Pippin he could not tell me—except that most in his line went by a 'by-name;' he had gone by his so long that when I used his real name he seemed uncertain whether he was the person addressed. I found him in occupation of two ground-floor rooms. Neither the rooms nor the locality in which they were situated would have suggested the idea that the tenant made, in Mrs Phipps's phrase, 'a sight o' money,' but old Pippin's rooms were exceptionally good in such a quarter, and still more exceptionally furnished. There was no lack of anything necessary for his large adopted family, but the place was in a sad muddle. His housekeeper was his niece, a good-looking but rather sour-looking widow of two or three and thirty, with a swarm of children. The youngsters, I could see, tyrannized over their good-natured grand-uncle, but they were also very fond of him. The mother likewise tyrannized over the old man, but she did *not* seem at all fond of him. On the other hand, she seemed to cherish a chronic grudge against him. She was plainly angry that a stranger should see how fond her children were—in spite of their teasing ways—of the old man who supported her and them. She interrupted our chat as often as she durst with hints about the tide, and muttered soliloquies *at* her uncle for dawdling at home instead of being at work. She tried to enlist my sympathies by insinuating that her uncle had done her some irreparably grievous wrong, but when she found that I reserved my pity for the old fellow who bore her ingratitude so cheerfully, she went off in a huff; and I was

by no means sorry to be left to continue my talk with old Pippin without further interruption than recurrent inrushings of the noisy children. I learnt the exact nature of old Pippin's relations to his niece, soon after she had flounced out to gossip in the court (banging the door after her, boxing the ears of one of her little boys for letting it jam his fingers, and then putting her angry face into the room again to make her uncle responsible, in some incomprehensible manner, for the poor little fellow's bellowing). But I will give old Pippin's history as concisely as I can *ab ovo*.

Nearly eighty years before the time in which I had my first talk with him, he had been born in Limehouse. His father was a lighterman, and as soon as Fred could run alone he was almost all day long on, or in, or on the shore of, the water. 'I should feel lost, sir,' he said, in reply to an inquiry whether he could not find some employment more suitable for his advanced age, 'if I was put anywheres where I couldn't see the river.' As soon as his little brother Jack, who was two years younger, could splash about with Fred, he was left almost entirely to Fred's care. 'It was a queer way to bring up children, but I liked it. Jack didn't. He was always weakly, poor chap, an' that made him peevish. Many a lickin' I've got takin' his part. I could ha' got on with the other boys, but poor Jack had a way of rilin' 'em, and then he'd come running to me.'

When the boys were seven and five both their parents died. 'I don't like to speak ill of my own father and mother, but 'tworn't much they'd ever done for us. 'Cept

that we'd to sleep where we could, their bein' dead didn't make much odds to us. We'd begun to pick up such a livin' as we could before they was dead, and so we'd only to go on doin' it when they *was* dead. It was a bad thing for two boys to be left to theirselves like that. I'm afraid we should ha' gone to the bad, if it hadn't been for an old woman we often come across down by the river. It worn't anything she could do for us in the way of food and that, for she'd to work hard for her own livin', poor old gal, and it worn't much of a one when she'd got it. But she'd give us a stitch now and then, and what's better, she tried to mend our manners for us. Of a Sunday evenin' she'd have us into her room, and tell us about what was good. It worn't much she knowed, perhaps, poor old gal, but what she did, she acted up to. You never heard her say a bad word, and she was the forgivin'est old creatur' I ever come across. The boys would tease her, and them as were old enough to know better were downright cruel to her sometimes; but she never bore 'em a grudge, and was as ready to do a good turn to them as she was to anybody else. She was such a cheery old bird, too. If anybody had a right to growl, she had, you might say; for she hadn't a soul in the world to look after her, and she was often ailing, and when she was about, she could never do much more than just make enough to keep soul and body together; but, catch Molly grumblin'! "I've got a friend up there," she'd use to say, pointin' to the sky; "and if things *is* a bit hard, I shall enjoy heaven all the more, when I get to it. My friend's gone afore to prepare a place for me—them's his own

words." I declare one evening when I went round to her place, and heard the poor old woman was dead and buried, I was a deal more cut up than I was when my own mother died. That must be seventy years ago and more, and yet I remember it as if it was yesterday. It was a Sunday evening. The bells was ringing, and the sun was shinin' on the river and the ships, and poor Jack was in the workhouse. He'd never been bad enough to be took in before. I felt lonely somehow, and thought I'd go round and have a chat with Molly, and there, when I got there, she was dead, you see. I've reason to remember her, for if it hadn't been for her, I might never ha' had the happy life I have. It was through her I got into the right way o' lookin' at things. And what she'd told me stuck to me somehow. I don't say I never did wrong—there ain't many can say that, I fancy. But I was ashamed of myself afterwards—I couldn't take a pride in it as some poor fellers does. And now for many a year I've felt that I've got a friend up there, too. It's a pleasant thing to think of when you're grubbin' about in the dark. Sayin' a prayer to yourself's better than swearin' down there.'

When Jack was discharged from the infirmary, the parish found employment for him as a shopkeeper's errand-boy, whilst Fred continued to pick up his crust anyhow on the river's bank. I gathered from the old man's hurt tone that at this time the better-fed and better-clad Jack grew ashamed of his ragged elder brother. 'But, of course,' added the old man in excuse, 'it wouldn't ha' done for Jack to ha' kept much company with me then. His

master would ha' thought that he was robbin' the till, and me a-helplin' him.'

After a time Fred made the acquaintance of some of the 'toshers'—men who hunt for 'marine stores,' old metal, &c., in the river's mud, turn over builders' dry rubbish, and used, at any rate, to explore the sewers, in search of the same, and any more literal valuables that may be buried in such apparently unlikely places. He soon became a proficient in the strange calling, and had followed it with more or less success ever since—much to the benefit of his brother and his family. Jack had married young, and soon had a great many children, with very small means of keeping them. Old Pippin had almost supported them whilst they were children, and had often had to help them after their marriage. His youngest niece, on her mother's death, had come back to her father's to keep his house. She was a widow, and had brought a brood of children with her. When her father died, old Pippin had 'set up housekeeping,' as he phrased it, in order to give his niece and her family a home. When I hinted that, considering the obligations under which she lay to him, I thought that she might be a little more gracious in her manner to him, he answered with a laugh, 'Ah, well, poor gal, her temper's short, there's no denyin'—but then, you see, sir, she's got it into her head that it's my fault that she's a widdy. She says that she could ha' done a deal better for herself if it hadn't been for me.'

'But what nonsense!'

'Well, no, sir, in a sort o' way there's some truth in it—

anyhow about her bein' a widdy. It was me as got her to marry her husband. Leastways I talked to her parents. And a very worthy young man he was, though he did die at a ill-convenient time. *He* couldn't help that, poor feller! You see there was another chap that was after her, that didn't mean no good. But he give himself airs as if he was a gen'leman, and she liked him best because of his fine clothes, and he could make her believe anything he liked, poor lass. So I spoke to Jack, and got her married to the t'other to keep her out o' harm's way. I meant well, but she don't seem to see it—and '*tis* tryin', no doubt, to a fine young woman like her to be left as she is with such a lot of kids as is pretty sure to scare off any other man from makin' up to her—but the little uns are a great comfort to me, poor dears—I should miss 'em, if they was took away from me.'

Old Pippin made very light of the disagreeables of his subterranean rambles. When I asked him how he could stand the malodour, he answered, 'Oh, I don't mind it a bit—I don't take no notice of it 'cept where it's special strong—and not then much if I takes a pipe. Some says the air in the shores is strengthenin'. I s'pose that's nonsense, but anyhow it ain't weakenin'. Look at me. I don't look much like a in-walid, do I, sir? And I've been up the shores, as often as the tides 'ud serve, ever since I was fifteen. If poor Jack had taken to the shores, instead of stickin' in a shop, he might ha' been alive and hearty now. Of course, there's foul air in places, as there is in the mines, that'll put your light out and choke a man in no time. It's a dangerous life—I'm not denyin' that.

When you can get through the muck, you don't mind a bit about it—you're thinking of what you'll fish out of it. But there's holes full of slush that 'd take you in over head and ears twice over. And if you don't look sharp, the tide may come in and drown ye, or the flushers may open a sluice close by, and so again you'd get drowned. Of course, they couldn't be expected to shout out, "By your leave," even if they knew we was there. We're looked on as a kind o' antelopers, though I can't see there's any harm we do—pickin' up what nobody would get if we didn't grub after it. Of course the people the money we pick up now and then belonged to would like to have it back, but who could find 'em out? So who's a better right to it than us as wenturs our lives for it? Tain't half as much as people make out. And it's good we do in searchin' after it—we help clean the shores, and pay ourselves. It's an honest life, ours is. The wonder to me is how any one as hasn't the fear of God before his eyes can take to it. Besides what I've told you, sir, there's places so rotten that if you was to touch a brick, you'd have a cartload down on ye, and there's places so narrer, that if you wentur up too far you may get stuck in 'em, and if a new hand gets away from his mates—and old hands, too, in places they ain't up to—they may just wander on till they drops down dead, or the rats tackles them. The rats is very wicious if you corners 'em. They *do* say there's wild pigs almost as big as bears in some shores. I don't know about that. Anyways, I never come across none, or anybody as had. But there's no doubt about the rats. They've pulled men down, and

worried 'em, and picked their bones as clean as a washed plate. The rats nearly did for me once. I'd heard a lot of 'em scuttling up before me, but I didn't care about that. They must be uncommon sharp-set to tackle a man, if they can get away from him. I didn't know that I'd got into what we call a dead-ender—that's a shore with a dead wall at the end of it—a kind of no admission, you understand, sir, except on business, and not much of that, for when you do get into 'em you'll find the muck dangling from the roofs like candles in a chandler's shop. All of a sudden, the warmin turned and came at me—scores of 'em—hundreds of 'em, I expect. I backed as fast as ever I could, and hit out with my hoe as well as I could, but the roof was so low I couldn't get a fair swing. Thankful enough, I can tell you, sir, I was when I got back to the main, and felt the rats rushing up and down it between my legs, without offerin' to bite me. I should like to die in my bed, and be buried like a Christian. And I thank God there seems a chance of it. It ain't likely anything will happen to me in the shores now, after what might ha' happened, and hasn't happened. After all, though, it don't matter much. If you believe in Him as has given you a chance o' gettin' there, you can go as straight to heaven out o' the shores as you could off your own bed. That's often been a quietin' thought to me when I've been in a fix.'

XXXIII.

A DOCK-LABOURER'S HISTORY.



WILL give one more sketch of river-side life—an account of one of the many casual dock-labourers with whom I have been acquainted. There is no type of character or costume common to this class of people. Their destitution is the only thing they have in common. Those whom misfortune, sickness, improvidence, vice, or crime has left penniless and friendless; but who have still the will, and fancy at least they still have the strength, for hard work that requires neither skill nor recommendation, muster about the dock-gates to fight for a chance of getting less than a groat an hour, as sparrows in hard frost fight for thrown-out crumbs in a back-yard.

One day I was making the round of visits I had down on my list for the day. I was bidding good-bye to a poor bed-ridden woman, who lay all day long in an almost dark cupboard, dependent on the rough charity of her

fellow-lodgers for any kindness or company until her weary daughter came home from work at night. This poor woman was singularly patient, not with the sullen patience which many sufferers have been hardened into, but with a patience which sprang from a genuinely submissive spirit. She thought little of herself, and bowed herself humbly, even cheerfully, to the will of God. I felt that it was presumption for me even to profess to teach Christianity to her. When I was with her I had to learn—to see the truths I talked about acted upon in unmistakable earnest. And yet I could not help lingering with this poor woman. It was such a change for her to have any one who could stay for a few minutes beside her lonely bed—such a joy to her to have any one with whom she could talk about Him who was her support and solace, and then (even in visiting the sick in the East-End clerical vanity survives) the personal reception this poor woman gave me was so different from what I got from a great many of those I visited, that I gave her, the demands upon it being considered, a disproportionate share of my time. On the occasion I speak of I was bidding her good-bye, at last, in a hurry, when she said,—

‘Couldn’t you spare time, sir, to see those poor people up-stairs?’

‘What poor people?’ I asked, thinking that her mind was wandering. I knew, not only of no poor people, but of no room, above her. I was under the impression that when I had reached her closet I had mounted to the ‘top of the house.’

‘The Searses, sir—haven’t you heard of them? The

poor woman was in just before you came—half beside herself.’

‘But is it a matter I must attend to to-day? I have more than half my calls to make yet.’

‘She says they haven’t a friend in the wide world to help them, and she’s afraid her husband will make away with himself. He can’t get anything to do, and she can’t get anything to do, and they’ve ever so many children.’

‘Well, I’ll go and see them; but which way must I get up to them?’

‘Turn to your right, sir, instead of going down-stairs, and you’ll find the ladder—about at the back of my bed.’

I obeyed her instructions, groping about in the dusk—dusk though it was noontime—of the top-landing, and mounting the short ladder, found the Searses in their strange upper chamber. They *had* a roof to cover them, and when that is said, all is said that can be said as to the homelikeness of their home. There was no lack of light or ventilation in their cock-loft, since several of the tiles had fallen from the roof. Between that dilapidated roof and the joists above the ceiling of the room beneath, Sears and his wife and a large family of small children were cooped. The poor whining youngsters were far less than half-clad in the most scarecrow collection of odds and ends that I had ever seen. One little girl had only a chemise on—a chemise made out of an old coal-sack, with holes cut in the sides for the arms, and in the bottom, changed into the top, for her poor lathy little neck. A boy’s ragged jacket, inverted and buttoned up behind, prematurely supplied another pinched baby with a

'skeleton-suit.' The sleeves were turned back at the 'wrist' to enable the poor little toes to find a way out from those queer trousers. Mrs Sears's scanty cotton gown, through wear and many washings, first brought back to the patternless hue of unbleached calico—a colour which much subsequent dirt had deepened into that of mud—hung so limply about her that it was plain she had no underclothing. Her face, if clean and plumped out, and if her unkempt hair had been neatly ringleted around it, would have been dollishly pretty. As it was, it looked like a doll's face melted and scratched away into a doll's death's-head. Sears's black-muzzled face, peering out from a shock of matted black hair, was as wasted as his wife's, but it had a far fiercer despair in it. He looked as if, had he been strong enough, he would have murdered me for intruding upon him.

I told him that I had come to make inquiries about him and his family.

'*Inquiries !*' he howled in scorn. 'Can't you see for yourself? If you haven't brought food, be off with ye.'

'Oh, don't talk like that, Tom. Don't mind him, sir—he don't mean it,' cried the poor little woman, in a piteous fright lest I should take offence and leave them to their fate. 'My children are starving, and so 'm I, and so 's he, poor fellow, or he wouldn't talk like that.'

I found that all they had had that week—and it was drawing to its close—was the two or three loaves the parish had granted them at the beginning of the week.

As they were plainly famished, I gave the man a trifle to buy some bread. As soon as he saw my hand move

towards my pocket, he sprang from the rough floor on which he had been grovelling, and stood over me with a menacing look, as if he would tear my heart out if I did not give him enough. He pounced upon the first coin I brought out, darted from the room, and dashed at a headlong pace down the staircase. The soles were almost falling from his boots, and a dreary flap-flap-flapping they made upon the stairs. Presently he came back panting like a dog. He shook all over. The exertion he had taken had so overcome him, that if I had not caught him, he would have fallen to the floor. When I laid hold of him, he clutched his loaves and glared at me as if he thought I meant to rob him of his bread. As soon as he was seated, he tore it into portions for his wife and children, and then fastened on his own crust. It was horrid to watch those poor creatures worrying their food. Except that the man had served the others before himself, and the woman had given her youngest child a bit of the piece she got before she began to eat, they might have been so many wolves. As it happened, I had never before seen poor starving creatures just come into possession of food. I turned away, and looked out through one of the holes in the roof upon a wilderness of tiles and chimneys until that terrible 'family meal' was over.

I began then to make inquiries. To begin with, I asked Sears whether being out in search for work would not be better than nursing his despair at home.

'Haven't I been?' he retorted fiercely, with many epithets, which I need not repeat. 'Wasn't I down at the Docks this morning? And wasn't I turned away, with

hundreds more, because this horrid east wind keeps on blowing, just to keep the ships out? I'm not afraid of work. Why don't you give me some, instead of talking about it? Whatever it is, I'll do it. I've worked, and she's worked, poor thing, whenever we could get work to do. Where can I get work now except at the Docks? and this beastly wind has done me out of the chance of that. I'm a likely-looking fellow for any one to hire, ain't I? *You'd* rig me out and be my reference, *wouldn't* you? And what's *she* to do—unless you want her to walk the streets? And that would be no use either; and yet she was a smart pretty lass once, poor thing!' And the man, as he said it, burst into a laugh, half of mockery, half of remorseful pity, all of utter misery, and clutched at the breast of his tattered, napless, greasy frock-coat with such violence that the string which supplied the place of buttons broke, and I saw that, as I suspected, he was shirtless.

It was not easily that I gained Sears's confidence. His heart was sore, and at war with all the world. If I took out my watch when I visited him, he looked as if I had insulted him. He seemed to think that I did him an injury in merely possessing a watch whilst he had none. At last, however, partly from him, and more from his poor little wife, I learnt something of their history, and, adding my own impressions, may put it together thus:—

Sears was the son of a small but tolerably thriving grocer and tea-dealer in a country town. He was placed at its free grammar-school, and proved himself a clever boy. So long as he was stimulated by novelty and vanity,

he would work, but when the work became mere hum-drum routine, he took no further interest in it. He was a flighty lad, and always getting into scrapes. When he left school his father wished to apprentice him to himself, but young Sears had a soul above a grocer's apron. He wanted to be a 'lawyer.' His father could not afford to article him, but he made interest with the attorney who managed such little law business as old Sears had to put into his hands, and the attorney, having heard that young Sears was a sharp lad, consented to take him into his office as a paid clerk, obscurely hinting that if he made himself useful, he might, perhaps, eventually get his articles given him. A month of copying and errand-running, however, disgusted Sears with the 'law.' Two or three other lines of life were tried for him at his own request, but time after time he came back upon his father's hands; grudging any work his father wished him to do at home, and yet feeling grievously injured if his father would not give him all the pocket-money he wanted. When his father refused him money, his mother was weak enough to supply him with it on the sly. He had grown up into a handsome hobbydehoy, dawdling about in a small country town, and fancying that he had 'gentlemanly tastes,' because he disliked regular work, and, without doing any, could somehow get comfortable food and drink, and tolerably smart clothes with a little money in their pockets. He soon found such a life as that 'slow,' and to escape from its *ennui*, plunged, or rather paddled, into the still duller dissipation within his reach. Perhaps it was no very great harm he did at first, but character is

soon lost in a small country town, where no ill deed can be hid, every ill deed is magnified, and deeds that admit of two interpretations are sure to be construed in the less charitable sense. Having obtained, however, the reputation of a 'scamp,' young Sears proceeded to justify it; and to escape the consequences of his *escapade*, he ran away to London, hurried to Charles Street, Westminster, and enlisted in a Lancer regiment. He chose the cavalry because he thought it the most dashing arm of the service, but when he had been sworn in and sent to his dépôt, he found that cavalry soldiers had a good many more disagreeable duties to perform than riding out in full regimentals, with their band braying and clashing and thumping in the van, and crowds of smiling women and children gaping admiration on either flank—than clanking their spurs in undress uniform on the pavements in the evening, with the air of heroes who have just saved their country, and confidently expect their non-militant countrymen's abject worship and their countrywomen's proudly affectionate gratitude. For one thing, Sears found that he had to be taught to ride, and the bullying and the chaff he received in the riding-school hurt him more even than the frequent falls he got there. And then—especially since he was not yet privileged to ride the horses, in public, when they *were* groomed—he loathed the 'stable-call' that rang with such taunting menace—'for if you don't do it, the Colonel shall hear-r-r'—through the morning air. He had not enlisted in the cavalry that he might get up at unseasonable hours to currycomb biting horses, and wheel about

barrow-loads of dung, in a dirty shirt, with braces dangling over dusty blue trousers that would give him a longer spell of brushing, to make them look decent, than he had to give his horses. He very soon wrote a penitent letter to his father, entreating him to buy him out. But the old man was annoyed by the disgrace which his son had brought upon him, and sternly refused. He was half inclined not to let his wife visit her son, but at last permitted her to do so. When, however, she came back in tears, he was as obdurate as ever. She tried to move him to pity by telling him that she had found her Tom on his knees at the barracks, scrubbing floors like a slavey; but the old man only answered that it was a good thing anybody could make Tom do anything anyhow useful. Accordingly young Sears was drafted off to the head-quarters of his regiment at the Cape, and for some months his family heard nothing of him. But he turned up again at home pretty speedily—discharged from the service, according to his own statement, on account of an accident he had met with. By this time the old man had softened towards his son, and the mother and sisters were very proud to welcome home their sun-burnt ‘warrior’ from foreign parts. At any rate, he had *seen* ‘wild Caffres.’ He recommenced his dawdling life, and though his character was really rather worse instead of better, he was at first regarded with rather more respect by his townsfolk as being one who had ‘seen the world.’ Whilst he was leading this idle life he fell in love with a blue-eyed, flax-haired little dressmaker, who listened to him as Desdemona listened to Othello, and, since she had, for a wonder,

decision of character enough to insist upon marriage, he married her clandestinely. His father was very angry when he discovered the marriage, but was persuaded by his wife to buy a small tobacconist's business in London for his son. He soon failed in that. His father put him into other small businesses—a musical-instrument shop, a news-vendor's, &c.—but he managed somehow to fail in all. At last the old man's patience was exhausted. In reply to a hundredth appeal for help—for all this time little ones had been coming as fast as they could come—he sent his son a £5 note, and told him that that was the last money he would ever have from home—that he had already had far more than was just to his sisters. Nevertheless, of course, the mother did send money after that; but that source of supply was soon dried up, and Sears found himself with a large family and nothing to keep them and himself upon. No doubt he was quite sincere when he told me that he would do any work—a poor fellow who cannot even get dock-work is not likely to be very fastidious—but I could plainly see that his 'pride' (to use a very absurd conventional phrase), foolishly encouraged by his fondly admiring little wife, had made him turn up his nose at chances of what he called 'menial' work which, if he had secured it, would have enabled him to earn some kind of a living, at any rate. Though he still called such work 'menial,' and thought he had been shamefully used in not having had the refusal of better employment offered him, he cursed his folly in having despised such work until it was too late for him to get it, however eagerly he might covet it.

When the mother's supplies ceased, Sears had to sell furniture and clothes to keep his family a little while longer afloat. Whilst he had still a 'respectable' suit of clothes he got a few odd jobs of work which he did not consider menial—receiving for them less than a quarter of the pay menial work for the same time would have brought him in. His wife did a little at her old trade, but the little suddenly became less and then became nothing. She soon had no clothes fit to seek customers in, and had come to live amongst people who had no money to spend on dress-making—who thought themselves lucky if they could make the rags they had still hold together anyhow. In his first sermon on the Lord's Prayer Mr Maurice remarks, 'As the mere legal, formal, distinctions of caste become less marked, how apt are men to indemnify themselves for that loss by drawing lines of their own as deep, and more arbitrary!' There is no section of our complex English society which that acute remark might not cause to flinch. Old families look down upon families of recent creation. Sons of men who have gained wealth and titles through commerce, speak with ludicrous horror of the defilement caused by 'twade.' The wholesale dealer looks upon a shopkeeper as a being with whom, except as a customer, he cannot possibly have any connection. The druggist's wife loftily ignores the baker's wife (although, perhaps, they went to school together), and the flour-powdered baker considers the butcher 'a greasy, vulgar feller.' In any claimant of intrinsic superiority founded on accidental circumstances, such airs would seem ridiculous—if they were not so

awfully unchristian. As Mr Maurice points out, how can such people say, in sincerity, 'Our Father?' And who, in his human phase, was the Saviour in whom these despisers of their brethren would fain hope they have interest enough, when they are on their death-beds, to get them into heaven? A carpenter's apprentice who afterwards had not where to lay his head, who lived on alms, and died a convict's death.

The unchristianity of social exclusiveness is so glaring that one hardly likes to laugh at its absurdity, and yet sometimes it *is* very amusing. I once heard a man without education, manners, wit, or even money, who, nevertheless, prided himself on being descended from a long traceable line of humdrum ancestors who had never done anything for the world except perpetuate their very uninteresting family, gravely state that although he charitably hoped that 'common people' *might* get to heaven, he could *not* believe that he should be obliged to mix with them there. He seemed to think that he, so to speak, would be ceremoniously shown into a celestial family-pew, whilst any common people who managed to enter heaven would have to slink into the free seats. Perhaps even more amusing than such folly as this is the *hauteur* with which people of the lower middle class look down on 'mere working men,' though they, or their fathers, may have been mere working men, and really better off as such than as small shopkeepers. To have to work so many hours a-day for a master degrades a man in the eyes of these social judges, and to have to 'sink' to such a position afflicts them as much as an 'aristocrat' would

be afflicted if compelled to wait behind the counter of a shop, and run out, bare-headed, cringing, smirking, and 'washing his hands with invisible soap,' to 'carriage customers.'

It was not, therefore, until starvation absolutely stared him in the face that Sears in desperation tried the Docks. He thought that, having stooped to such a degradation, he was sure of work, but he found himself terribly mistaken. Many a time after shouting himself hoarse, and getting squeezed black and blue, in his efforts to attract the attention of the calling foreman, he had found himself still unhired. When there was the slightest chance of fresh hands being needed in the course of the day, he lingered on in or about the Docks until pay time came, in a faint hope of earning a few pence by a sudden job. At other times, as on the occasion on which I made his acquaintance, he returned to his wretched 'home' to madden himself by the sight of those for whom he felt that he ought to have been the bread-winner. There was not much to esteem in the man's character, and, therefore, I was glad to see that he never shirked his responsibility as husband and father. I have known many men, under less crushing circumstances, free themselves of the care of wife and children—by running away from them. It was, I think, a fortunate thing for poor little Mrs Sears and her children that, even when anxious to get her handsome husband anyhow, she insisted on his marrying her. The legal tie not only made him afraid of the consequences of deserting his wife and children, but gave him a respect for her, however wildly he might talk at times,

which she would certainly have lacked if she had come to him on the terms he was at first base enough to propose. It was pathetic to see how the poor little woman, in spite of her frequent repinings at the privations to which she had been reduced, would try hard to fancy that she was as fond of her husband as ever she was, and that he was as fond as ever of her. Poor little wasted doll! I am afraid that there was not much fondness left in her husband's heart—that he would have shed few tears over her corpse, so long as the children had died before her. But, at any rate, he did—however surlily—what he could for his wife and children. When he got a day's work at the Docks he toiled on all day—straining at winches, and walking up hollow cylinders like a wearily heavy-footed squirrel—without diminishing his small pay in summer, his smaller pay in winter, by running into debt with the 'grub-man' beyond a penny or so he felt himself compelled to expend on trust when, as often was the case, he had gone fasting to his fight for work.

I did not know the Searses long. They vanished from their cock-loft with as little notice as they had entered it.

My bed-ridden old woman told me of their departure. 'If they was lying in the ground, with their souls at peace with God through Jesus Christ, I should be glad to know they was gone—though it was a kind o' company to hear the poor little things scuffling overhead.'

XXXIV.

‘KETCH ’EM ALIVE, OH !’



LITTLE way ahead of me one summer evening I noticed a pale sickly lad of ten or eleven languidly swinging himself along upon a crutch, whilst a sturdy, chubby, curly-headed little fellow, a year or two younger, trotted by his side. They had not gone far before a lounging hobby-dehoy brutally knocked up the cripple's crutch, and the poor little fellow fell violently on his face. My fingers itched to box the young coward's ears, but before I could get to him, the chubby little boy, whose curly head scarcely came above the scoundrel's waistband, had rushed in at him, and was punishing every reachable portion of his frame with fist and foot most strenuously. The bully looked half scared, but still he could have crushed his young antagonist by merely falling on him, and, therefore, I fear the cripple's plucky little champion would have come off second best in the long run, had it not

been for my presence on the scene. Availing himself of that as an excuse for turning tail before so diminutive an opponent, the hobbydehoy took to his heels; turning back, when he had got to a safe distance, to shake his fist at Curly Head and shout, ‘I’ll pay yer when I ketches yer. I’ll wring yer neck, yer young warmin; and *won’t* I give Dot-and-go-one a hidin’?’

Curly Head was white with rage and quivering with indignation. ‘Don’t blubber, Jack,’ he said half crossly, half pityingly to the cripple—‘don’t let that cur see he’s hurt ye. He’s my brother, sir,’ Curly Head explained to me, ‘and he’s lame and weak, and so that willin is allus a-persecutin’ him, when I ain’t by to take his part.’

Poor Jack’s nose was bleeding, and he had been altogether so much shaken by his fall that I thought it well to walk back with the boys to their home, close by, from which they had started for an evening stroll. We entered a ground-floor room in a house in a blind alley. At the doors of most of the houses, slovenly men in shirt-sleeves, and sluttish women who looked half-undressed, were lolling and squatting—some smoking, others panting as if the foully sultry air half-stifled them. But in this room a mangle was rumbling backwards and forwards. The perspiring woman who was turning it rested on the handle as we went in. ‘Why, my Jack,’ she cried, ‘what’s up? Sam’—turning reproachfully to Curly Head—‘I thought you’d ha’ took better care of your brother, or I wouldn’t ha’ let him go out with you.’

Poor little Sam seemed to feel this reproach very keenly. But I explained that he was not in the slightest

degree to blame for what had happened to his invalid elder brother, and trumpeted his prowess in avenging his brother's wrongs. Jack was as eager as I was to free Sam from blame. The mother put the door-key down Jack's back to stop the bleeding at the nose, and then, having felt him all over to make sure that no bones were broken, opened a cupboard, out of which rolled the boys' bundle of bedding; arranged it, with Sam's help, in a corner, and bade Jack lie down and rest upon it. By the time she went back to her mangle we were all on very friendly terms with one another. Conversation, however, is carried on with difficulty in a room in which a mangle is rumbling, and, therefore, I soon took my departure. It was hastened by a hint which the good woman gave that the boys had better undress and go to bed:—"Jack'll feel easier with his clothes off, and you've got to be up early to-morrow, Ketch-'em-alive!"

Little Sam grinned, and began to unbutton his waistcoat, but stopped suddenly, in perplexity as to whether it would be 'behaving proper' to undress before a parson—especially a parson who had found no fault with him for fighting.

An evening or two afterwards I called to inquire after Jack. As I sat chatting with him and his mother, Sam came in—looking a very queer little figure. He was sunburnt as red as a brick, and his peakless cap was tiaraed with a yellow fly-paper thickly studded with flies.

'Sold 'em all, mother,' he shouted—

"'Ketch 'em alive, the nasty flies,
Don't let 'em bite poor baby's eyes."

And now I must be off to get some more. I'll soon be back, Jack. There's the money, mother. Ketch 'em alive, oh !'

He rattled a heap of coppers out of his trousers-pockets on to the table, asked his mother for silver to purchase his next day's stock, and went off whistling to get it.

'I'm sure he didn't see you, sir,' apologized his mother, fearful that I should feel hurt at not having been noticed by so influential a member of the family as Sam. 'He's a dear good boy,' she added, as she counted out the coppers. 'Miles he must ha' walked—his little legs must be fit to drop off. Seven dozen he's sold. If he could sell 'em like that every day, me and you could do, couldn't us, Jack? I wish you could go out, too, Jack, and so do you, don't you, Jack? And there's only a penny he's spent on hisself, if he's spent that. He must be half famished. Git his supper out, Jack, and run round and buy a saveloy, there's a good boy—Sam likes a relish.'

Jack instantly hopped off, and the good woman, delighted with her younger son's earnings, again broke forth in praises of him. 'A dear good boy he is. Every penny he earns he brings me. It's a pity there isn't flies all the year round, though they is such a bother. The papers—leastways when they first comes up—pays better than shoe-blackin', and they're respectabler than tumblin'. But Sam'll do that when he can't git anythink else to do—and uncommon well he does it. You'd die of laughin' to see him go along on his toes and 'ands, 'eels hover 'ead, jest as if he vas a vheel. And he can walk about on his 'ands with his legs a-danglin' down—all kind o' thinx that boy

can do. It's a blessin' to 'ave a son like him. Anythink he can do, he will do, and do it well, too. I wish Jack was like him, but that ain't poor Jack's fault, and two brothers fonder o' one another you won't see, go where you will,—no, not if they was young princes in golden palaces. Jack'll do anythink he can, poor boy, and, bein' the eldest, it must be 'ard for him not to do 'alf a quarter as well as Sam. But he never shows it, and poor Jack didn't ought to neither. Sam looks arter him like a father—a deal kinder than his own father were. My poor 'usband—he's been at rest this four year, thank God—used to whop poor Jack, though he were a cripple. It's made me so savage that, God forgive me, I've sent the flat-iron flyin' at his 'ead, and I shouldn't ha' much cared then if it had settled him, though I feel lonesome without him now. But it were a cryin' shame, worn't it, sir, though he *is* dead, poor man? You should ha' seen my little Sam. He worn't much more than a babby then, but he'd clinch his little fists and polish off his daddy in a surprisin' manner for a child o' his years. My old man would laugh, but I do believe he got afraid to lift his hand agin Jack when Sam were by. And to see that boy now when Jack's bad. He always works as 'ard as ever he can, but then you'd say he worked 'arder than ever he could, to git back to Jack, and he'll sit by him for the hour together and play marbles on the bed-clothes. We're talkin' about Sam,' said the woman, as Jack hopped in with the saveloy. '*Ain't* he a good boy, Jack?'

'Who says he ain't?' answered Jack, glancing fiercely at me, as if he meant to fling his crutch at my head, if he

found that I had been maligning his brother's character.

Presently Sam came back with his bundle of fly-papers. He was shy at first when he saw me, and was very hungry moreover. He ate his supper in silence, but when that was over, he soon recovered his tongue, and began to tell us of his adventures. He had started in the early morning for Finchley, and then worked back into the City by way of Fortis Green, Muswell Hill, Crouch End, Hornsey Rise, Holloway, Canonbury, and the New North Road. ‘I wished you was with me, Jack,’ I heard him say to his brother. ‘They was cuttin’ the ’ay out by ’Ighgit. I sold six to them as was cuttin’ it, to take ’ome, but one chap put his down, sticky side up’ards, and when he went to look for it he couldn’t see it for the flies. So I give him another for nuffink, becos he’d give me a bit o’ bacon and a sup o’ beer. They was restin’ ’avin’ their dinners, so I stopped an’ ’ad a rest too, and see, Jack, what I’ve brought ye—I got ’em whilst I was waitin’.’

Out of his cap and his jacket-pocket Sam produced a pile of crushed grass, weeds, white clover, groundsel, sorrel, hemlock-blossom, and plantain-spires. It was a queer-looking posy, but Jack hung delighted over it, arranging it as artistically as he could. Crushed though it was, the sweet scent of the dewy, sunny country still lingered upon it, and common though the leaves and flowers were, they were precious to poor Jack, whose infirmity had prevented him from ever reaching a meadow. All his little life long he had been cooped up in brick and mortar. Grimy Goodman’s Fields were the only fields he knew, and the garden in Trinity Square the biggest

spread of verdure he had ever seen. Sam had also brought home a plump little red field-mouse from the hay-field. 'I was layin' down,' he said, 'and I see somefink cuttin' along as if it was a bit o' brick runnin', so I grabbed at it, and it felt soft, but I'd precious 'ard work to ketch it, it wriggled in and out so, and there it was a kind o' mouse. I 'ope I 'aven't squashed him. I knew you'd like to see him, Jack.' Sam put his hand into his shirt-bosom, and pulled out poor rumped, almost asphyxiated little mousie. He looked at first very much as if he *had* been 'squashed,' but gradually recovered breath and spirits, and trailing his stumpy little tail, scuttled across the table right into the hands of delighted Jack. The mother was by no means so delighted. 'What ever did you go for to bring that nasty thing home for, Sam?' she querulously inquired. 'Hain't we got enough o' them beastly rats and mice without your bringin' more on 'em to eat us up?—What ever are you a-strokin' him for, as if he was a Christian, Jack?' she added sharply. 'Turn him out into the lane this minute, and don't be sich a babby. I do wonder you and Sam hain't more sense.'

But Sam, who had brought home mousie in the verified expectation that his stay-at-home brother would be pleased to make a pet of such a curiosity, pointed out loftily, if not very learnedly, the differences between town and country mice, and saddled himself with the responsibility of procuring provender for the captive. Sam's notions of what the mouse would 'like to eat' were vague, but he arranged matters to his own satisfaction by stating that he could always go once a week, at any rate, and get 'a lot o'

stuff out of an 'edge.' Accordingly Jack was allowed to retain his pet, and when I left, the two boys were very busy making a home for mousie out of an old cigar-box that had somehow found its way into their rank-tobacco-smoking alley. The flies were very numerous that summer, and Sam got rid of his papers very readily. He never remembered such a time, he said, with a grave air of 'old experience'—his acquaintance with the 'ketch-'em-alive-oh' business dating only from the previous summer. 'Sam's goin' ahead, sir,' said his pleased mother on another evening when I looked in. 'He's got quite a connection now. Some of his customers say they do believe the papers only draws the flies. Any'ow they ketches 'em, and the people goes on buyin' the papers. Hup 'Ighgit way, more partic'lar, there's a regular run on 'em. And that Sam is sich a boy. A dear good boy he is. What do you think he's been and gone and done now, sir? He's been talkin' so about the medders hup 'Ighgit way that poor Jack fair pined to git a sight on 'em. Afore to-day he's never been out o' London, poor boy. And what do you think that Sam o' mine went and did? There's a man that lives down Crown Yard as keeps a furnitur' wan, and Sam found out that he were a goin' on a job somevheres hup by the Harchway Tavern, and so Sam got him to give both of 'em a lift so far as that, and then Sam was to take Jack into the medders, and leave him there whilst he went about sellin' his ketch-'em-alives, and come for him and pay his 'bus back to the Bank, as if he was a gen'leman, and Jack was to wait for him there,

and they'd come home together. I wish they was in. They'll both be dead-tired, poor boys.'

They certainly did look tired when they came in a few minutes afterwards. Even the walk from the Bank was a pull upon Jack's strength, and although little Sam had got the lift to Highgate, he had been on his legs nearly all day.

But two happier boys I never saw. Jack had been holiday-making from early morning in a world that was so new to him that he could hardly believe in its reality. By that time the grass must have been dried up and the hedges dusty, but 'Oh! mother, everything's green and clean in the country,' was Jack's ecstatic summary of his experiences.

Sam was as pleased, because he had not only done well in his business, but also been able to stand treat to his sick brother. Perhaps Sam showed a little half jealous, half supercilious superiority, when Jack talked of the country as if somehow he understood it better, could get more pleasurable meaning out of it, though he had been only one day in it, than experienced Sam. To keep up his reputation for experience, Sam would ever and anon interject the name of a road, &c., into Jack's descriptions of the places he had visited—'Them's St John's Willas'—''Ornsey Lane they calls that'—and so on. But although Sam was better up than his brother in topographical nomenclature, he seemed quite astounded that Jack had noticed so many things that *he* had not noticed. 'One 'ud think you'd heyes at the back o' yer 'ead, Jack—but then it's all new to *you*, an' I'm glad you

liked it,' said experienced and, on the whole, delighted little Sam.

Hot summer weather extended late into the autumn that year. Sam sold so many 'ketch-'em-alives,' that he began to wonder what his mother could do with 'all the money' he brought home. Jack had more than one other country trip out of it, and then—frost setting in suddenly, Jack being laid up for the winter, and both Sam and his mother suddenly sinking from full work into slack—their united 'all' very soon looked very little. The change made the poor woman peevish. Sam's lean days had swallowed up his fat days out of her memory. She no longer sang his praises, and although she never ceased to pity poor Jack, her pity took a form that was very unpleasant to both boys. She was fond of saying before me, when they were both present, that it was 'a thousand pities Jack hadn't the use of his limbs—*he'd* be a good, industr'ous boy, instid o' livin' on his mother, doin' nothin'; which there is a hexcuse for *him*, poor feller, becos he can't do a mortal think, 'owever he might wish it.'

Jack did not like to be reminded in this way of his infirmity, but he felt more on account of the injustice done to willing little Sam—a good deal more than Sam felt for himself. Of course, when he had been out in the cold streets all day trying hard to earn a few pence, he thought it too bad that he should be snubbed for having brought home so few, and that he should be scowled at as a robber of his struggling mother and sick brother if he had ventured to invest in a 'ha'p'orth' of 'baked

plum' or 'currant roley-poley' for his own out-of-doors consumption ; but Sam bore the snubbing and the scowling very philosophically. He knew that Jack did not think him lazy or selfish, and went on being thoughtfully kind to Jack, and waiting patiently until his mother should be in a better temper. He would fire up sometimes at her constant harping on his brother's involuntary uselessness, but he never gave her back an angry word—I cannot say *quite* so much about looks—in return for her constant nagging at what she made out to be his wilful lack of work.

Altogether I came to entertain a great respect for little 'Ketch-'em-alive-oh,' as I had got into the habit of calling Sam. The title from my lips at first not only amused him but gratified him ; but I ceased to use it when I found that it slightly annoyed him even from me, as reminding him of the time when his mother had made so much of him because there were so many flies to catch alive. My respect for the little fellow was not in the slightest degree lessened because he could not help sometimes showing by his looks that his sense of justice had been wounded. I have small respect for people who are always talking about their rights and righteousness—small belief in the rights and righteousness of which they prate ; but I do not think that little Sam sinned grievously against the law of Christian charity in not being able always to prevent his eyes from saying that his mother did him wrong.

XXXV.

BESSIE MARRIED.



BEGAN this series of desultory papers with an account of 'Little Creases.' I will end it with a little further account of her.

She grew up into a handsome young woman—so handsome that I was very glad when she ceased to be a street-seller. Her grandmother became so infirm both in body and in mind that it was necessary she should have some one always with her. The neighbours advised Bessie to let her be taken into the work-house, but Bessie would not hear of this; although poor Mrs Jude, in her imbecility, had relapsed into the cantankerousness which was her characteristic before she had come under any softening influences. For Bessie's sake, neighbours would now and then drop in to look after the old woman, but not often, or for long. In their own phrase, it 'worn't pleasant to 'ave their noses snapt off jist for doin' a kindness to the old cat.' So Bessie had

to give up the wandering life which long habit had made far pleasanter than a sedentary life seemed to her at first, and stay at home to look after, and work hard for, a poor cross old woman who had never shown her much kindness, and who rewarded her kind nurse for her often most disagreeable duties by constant grumpiness and fault-finding, and sometimes by speeches that would have been shamefully insulting if the poor old creature had been responsible for her utterances. When, however, such speeches are only slight exaggerations of utterances which the hearer remembers to have been made when the utterer *was* responsible, it is difficult to allow at all times full weight to the plea of irresponsibility, and, under any circumstances, such speeches are not pleasant to listen to. Bessie's temper was often sorely tried, but it bore the trial bravely. The goodness of cloth is tested by rubbing it the wrong way, and that is the only infallible mode of testing goodness of temper likewise.

The indoor work which Bessie did was not all of one kind. She did whatever she could get to do. One of her jobs, I remember, was fireworks-making. A manufacturer of these, on a small scale, lived in Bateman's Rents, and he employed Bessie to stuff his cases. A day or two before one Fifth of November I went into Mrs Jude's room, and found the old woman raking out the little fire, which I learnt Bessie had already lighted five times. "'Tain't any use, sir," whispered Bessie, with a smile, when I began to remonstrate with the old woman. 'Granny 'll feel cold bimeby, an' then she'll be glad on it. I'd keep her warm, if she'd let me, but it puts her out,

and so I humour her, poor thing.' Mrs Jude had been listening with a face full of suspicion, almost of hatred. Replying to what she had imperfectly overheard, she said angrily, 'Puts it out! Yes, and I means to put it out. I ain't a-goin' to be blowed up with gunpowder, whilst I've got my five senses left. That's what that gal's doin' it for. And me that's kep' her since she was a babby. She wants to git rid o' me, she do; but she shan't, not whilst I've got my senses. Mayhap, my strength ain't what it was, though Bessie do make me do all the nastiest work—a dozen times and more I've had to see to that fire—and yet she won't give me enough to eat. But I ain't a fool yet, though Bessie 'd make folks think so. You're a reg'lar bad gal, Bessie—jest like your wicked mother; but I ain't a-goin' to be blowed up with gunpowder.'

And the old woman chuckled, wagged her head, and went on raking out the coals.

Bessie might, perhaps, have felt uncomfortable if her grandmother had talked in this way before some people; but she knew that I should not attach any weight to what the poor old creature said, and so she said nothing in reply, but went on smutting her face and fingers at her little table, so littered with powder and blue and whitey-brown serpent cases that it looked like a Lilliputian arsenal.

I asked Mrs Jude whether she would not let me take the tongs and put the embers back into the grate, on the plea that I felt cold.

'Ah, well, she wouldn't blow me up while you was

here,' Mrs Jude answered, giving me the tongs. When I had coaxed the coals into a little flame, she warmed her hands enjoyingly over it, and went on,—

'Everybody's kinder to me than my own flesh and blood. That gal knows how perished I feel, settin' here shiverin' without a fire; but she will make me. If she can't blow me up, she thinks she can make me ketch my death o' cold. She's a downright bad gal—jest like her mother. 'Twouldn't be safe for me to live with her, if I hadn't my wits about me. But that's what I have, thank God, and I ain't a-goin' to be friz to death, no, nor I ain't a-goin' to be blowed up nayther, and that's what I can tell her!'

I was foolish enough to try to show the poor old woman the real state of the case—how ludicrously she was deceived, how utterly she misrepresented Bessie. In reply, Mrs Jude jerked up her chin with a scornful though voiceless little laugh, and a wooden look of obstinate incredulity. If I couldn't see things that lay plain before my eyes, why then it was no use talking to me any more about them: *that* was what poor Mrs Jude's look said. I dropped Bessie, and got the old woman to talk about other matters. Every now and then, as we chatted, she would nod off to sleep, but she often got interested, and talked as sanely as she had ever talked. She proved to be right, and Bessie and I wrong, as to the date of some little occurrence in Bateman's Rents we had been talking about. The poor old woman was delighted at her triumph. The next minute she was floundering in a chaos of curiously distorted and blended recollections; but as we had owned that she had once been right, she

felt sure that, whatever we might choose to say, we must acknowledge to ourselves, at any rate, that she was always right, and she rode roughshod over us accordingly. She did so with an exultation evidently so pleasant to herself that Bessie and I had not the slightest wish to disturb her belief in her infallibility. From the argumentative vantage-point she thought she occupied she began to look down so complacently on Bessie that I began to hope that Bessie would be spared any more sharp speeches.

But Bessie washed her gunpowdery hands, went to the cupboard, put some food on a plate, mixed a little weak brandy-and-water, and brought the solid and liquid refreshment to her grandmother, saying cheerily, 'Now then, granny, it's time. The doctor said, you know, that you was to take a little and horfen.' The poor old woman gave a pettish push at the plate and glass,—taking care, however, not to spill the brandy-and-water. 'The doctor didn't say nuffink o' the sort,' she answered testily. 'The doctor don't know nuffink. 'Tain't horfen I gits it. No, I don't. There's nuffink fit to heat in this 'ouse. You're allus a-stuffin' me till I'm fit to bust. And sperrits!—you know I never tasted sperrits in my life. You git 'em in to drink 'em yourself, and make me your hexcuse; and who's to pay for 'em, I'd like to know? That's how I'm put upon, sir.'

'Come, granny, take your grub, and drink this up—it'll do you good.'

'No, I 'ont.'

But the poor old woman, when left to herself, did eat her food, and drink her drink, in slow enjoyment—only

complaining of her brandy-and-water, first that it was so strong, it took her breath away ; and, next, that it was so weak that *she* couldn't taste 'nuffink but water spilled.'

But poor Mrs Jude's temper was soon again ruffled by the appearance of a good-tempered young fellow, who looked rather sheepish when he found that I was there.

'What is it, Flop?' asked Bessie, who also looked rather shamefaced.

'Is his legs ready, Bessie?' was the rejoinder.

Bessie drew two long roughly-sewn empty sacking-bags from under the bed, and Flop (= Philip) departed. 'Ah, that's the way I'm treated now,' groaned Mrs Jude. 'That gal brings her fellers colloquin' about, and robs me to my wery face.'

'Why, granny, them ain't yourn, an' they wouldn't be worth much if they was. You see, sir, Flop and his brother is goin' out with a Guy on the Fifth, and so as me and Flop's acquainted, I said I'd do the legs for 'em. 'Tain't that they want no more shapin' than a roley-poley pudden, but Flop ain't over 'andy with his needle.'

'And what is Flop?'

'Well, sir, he ain't doin' nuffink jest at present. A light-porter he were, but he slipped off a ladder and 'urt the small of his back, and so he lost his place, and now he's lookin' about for another, poor feller. That's why he's a-goin' out with the Guy. He's a wery industr'ous young man, and don't like to set twiddlin' his thumbs.'

'But what will he get by his Guy?'

'Oh, mayhap, clear a pound or so, if them Hirish don't set on him, and take it, and spile the Guy. They're that

spiteful—'specially when the Guys is about. They makes 'em as rampagious as mad bulls, an' they're savage enough at the best o' times.'

'Those poor Irish, Bessie. Haven't you learnt to leave them alone yet?'

'It's them as won't leave us alone, sir. What right has them Romans to hinterfere with us Protestants in our own country? If we likes to carry Guys, and Popes, and Cardinal Wisemans about, and burn 'em arterwards, we've a right to, and serve 'em jolly well right. You was a-preachin' agin the Pope yerself, sir, on'y last Sunday.'

'I don't think I said that it was a kind or a sensible thing to make a hideous image of him and carry it about to exasperate people who reverence him. You have improved wonderfully since I first knew you, Bessie, but you have a good deal of charity to learn yet. You must remember that Roman Catholics, after all, are fellow-Christians.'

'*Christians!* They may call themselves so; and so you might call yerself a cowcumber, but that wouldn't make ye one.'

The fear of what might happen to Flop's Guy had so intensified Bessie's dislike of the Irish—originally a merely traditional unreasoning international antipathy, but now disguised under cover of regard for pure doctrine—that she raised her voice in a way that made me raise my eyes.

Mrs Jude instantly struck in. The poor old woman chafed under the constant supervision which Bessie's kindness compelled her to keep over her grandmother.

There was a chance now, Mrs Jude thought, of her bringing her monitress to book with the interested approval of a bystander, and so she exclaimed with delighted indignation,—

‘Who are you a-talkin’ to, you saucy slut? An’ you as shammed to set such store on parsons! Is *them* yer manners?’

I got the poor old woman into chat again, and presently I read and prayed with her. At first she objected to the reading. The Bible was good, very good, no doubt, she said, but it was no use now to the likes of her. But when she caught familiar phrases, they seemed to soothe her. She nodded her head approvingly, and ceased tapping her fingers with feeble impatience on the arms of her chair. When Bessie and I knelt down, she insisted on kneeling down too. When we rose from our knees, she did not resent the necessary help which Bessie gave her in rising from hers. She shook hands with me at parting as if she were quite at peace with herself and every one else once more; but I had hardly got outside the room before I heard her again scolding Bessie, and again obstinately raking out the coals.

Of course, I had discovered the relation in which ‘Flop’ stood to Bessie, and therefore made it my business to make inquiries about him. I found that he was a very worthy young fellow, sober, industrious, and very fond of the handsome young woman I still could not help thinking of, and occasionally speaking of, as ‘Little Creases.’

For a time, like Bessie, he did any odd jobs he could get hold of; but he saved money enough to procure his

license, and, at last, thanks to the character he received from the firm in whose service he had been as a junior light porter, he was engaged as a conductor for one of the Bow and Stratford omnibuses. Four shillings a day, certain, seemed a handsome income to Bessie—she began to consider Flop quite a person of property. But hard enough he had to work for his 28s. a week—up so early, home so late, that he had scarcely time to court. And worse still, he was as busy on Sundays as on other days. He had to give up coming to church. This was a sore trial to Bessie. It was she who had persuaded Flop to come to church, and, when she could get a neighbour to sit with her grandmother, it had been a great pleasure to her to attend service with her ‘young man.’ I asked Flop whether he could not get a Sunday now and then if he asked for it.

‘I could git one, sir, fast enough,’ he answered with a grin, ‘but I shouldn’t have no need to ax for another. “You needn’t hurry back”—that’s what they’d say to me.’

Bessie thought that, perhaps, under these circumstances, it would be better if Flop gave up his berth, but just then he had no chance of getting anything else, and so Bessie, who was very fond of her Flop, only half-heartedly advised him to take this course, and he continued a conductor.

He had behaved very well in reference to Mrs Jude. At first Bessie had said that she could not marry whilst her grandmother was alive. Flop had then proposed that Mrs Jude should live with the young people.

‘No, Flop,’ Bessie had answered, ‘you’re a-goin’ to

marry me, but you ain't bound to marry my granny too.'

'Well, but she'll be *my* granny when we're married?'

'No, Flop, that ain't marriage lor. What's yours is mine, and what's mine's my own. And if she would be, it 'ud be agin the Prayer-Book for you to marry your own grandmother.'

But Flop took two rooms, one for the old woman, and insisted on being married as soon as he could get a day to be married in. It was not any liking that the old woman had shown for him which made him wish to take her into his home. When he went into hers she would scowl at him all the time he stayed there; talking at him to herself, as if he were a villain bent on robbing her of everything she possessed, and bringing down her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Flop at last plucked up courage and asked 'at the yard' for a day to get married in. He was told that his employers had no objection to his getting married—that was no concern of theirs—but that he must not waste a minute of their time—time they paid him for—in getting his wife. At last, however, he managed to obtain an hour in the slack part of the day. I married the young couple, and then Flop had to rush back to his monkey-board in his new suit, with a dahlia in his button-hole—there to be chaffed considerably as he went up and down the road on account of his beamingly swellish appearance; whilst Bessie went back to Bateman's Rents to take off her wedding-clothes, pack up a few articles of furniture, and convey them and her grandmother to their new home.

The old woman was pleased at first with her new room,

but soon got an almost fixed notion that the young people who were befriending her were living at her expense, because she missed one or two things she had long been accustomed to in Bateman's Rents. They had been sold for a trifle, because Flop had bought better of the kind. I am afraid that Bessie had not a very lively wedding-day, but, fortunately, Mrs Jude was asleep when Flop came home at night, and when Bessie ran out to meet him, once more in her wedding-gown, London did not hold a happier bride or bridegroom.

In due course, a Bessie junior made her appearance, Bessie senior was intensely proud of her baby, and talked as if she had suddenly grown ten years older. Flop doted on little Bessie. He did not grumble at having his rest broken by her restlessness and wails; but he did complain when, shortly afterwards, owing to his early departures and late arrivals, he could only see his child asleep. His wife often had great difficulty in preventing him from waking baby up in order to discover whether she 'took notice' of 'daddy.' Mrs Jude sometimes made much of her great-granddaughter, and talked to the baby in confidence about the wrongs which Flop and Bessie had done to both of them. Sometimes she seemed quite unconscious of the child's existence, even when it had got her yellow, shrivelled finger in its pink, plump, crumpled paw, or silverily-slobbering little rosebud of a mouth. At other times Mrs Jude would scowl at the baby as a villanous conspiratrix with its father and mother against her peace of mind and body. And then poor Mrs Jude would rock herself and moan,—'I wish I was

dead—I wish I was dead—nobody cares for me—nobody. They'll be glad to git rid on me—nobody, nobody.'

One Saturday night Flop came home and said, 'I can go to church with you to-morrow, Bessie.'

'Oh, that *is* jolly,' answered Bessie; 'but what makes you look so glum, Flop?'

'They've given me the sack, that's all, Bessie. I axed 'em what they'd got agin me, and they said *nothin'*. No more they haven't, whatever cheats is about that I'm to suffer for. *Nothin'*, they says, but I needn't come to-morrow—they don't want me any more. Is that a fair way to treat a man? I don't doubt they do git cheated, but I never wronged 'em of a penny. Is that the way to treat a honest man? Let 'em say what they think, and I could answer them fast enough. But, no, they says "*nothin'*," and what can I do? There ain't another yard'll take me, turned out o' theirs. "*Nothin'*" 'on't do for a character in the 'bus line. It's a cowardly shame—it *is*, Bessie. There's you, and baby, and that poor old granny o' yourn—'

Mrs Jude had been roused from sleep by the unwonted loudness of her grandson-in-law's voice. She staggered out of her inside room into the one in which Bessie, rocking the baby, and savagely gesticulating Philip, were sitting. Mrs Jude's contribution to the conversation was more concise than comforting—

'There, you gal, I allus said that feller was a willin, and now you knows it.'

Soon afterwards the poor old woman died—waking up once more, just before she died, to a consciousness that

her dreary life had been made dreary not entirely without fault on her side. 'Ah, sir,' she gasped, 'Bessie's been good, I don't deny, but talk to me about Christ Jesus—He's the only un that can care about me. Bessie don't—nobody—nobody—'cept Christ Jesus. I'm a lonely old woman—nobody 'll miss me. Though I did nuss Bessie from a babby. But there's Christ, as I never did nuffink for. He'll—' And the old woman ceased to speak, for ever — with those poor, pale, peevishly-puckered lips.

Soon after this I lost sight of my brave Bessie and her honest husband. They went to Liverpool, and then they vanished—in what direction, some strange mischance prevented me from ever learning.

Bessie had done me so much good when I was a novice in clerical duty that I could never think either honest Flop or even her silverly slobbering baby quite worthy of her; but still I had a hearty liking for all three, for personal as well as relative reasons. I am heartily sorry, therefore, that I cannot finish off with a more definite—pleasantly definite—account of what became of Bessie and her belongings; but throughout these papers I have followed fact instead of fancy, and, therefore, I must finish as I began. My papers have been full of November fog, but if you wish to register honestly the weather of a district in which November fog is the normal atmosphere, it is impossible to keep that fog from recurring, however wearisomely, in your register. But I hope that I have been able to show that the Sun of Righteousness can mellow, gild, even dissipate, the dreariest gloom of East-

End life ; and that, although it is true enough that

‘—misery is trodden on by many,’

it is *not* true that misery is,

‘—being low, never relieved by any,’

even of those who share, or are only an infinitesimal grade above, the dismal depths of East-End distress.

THE END,

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS

